University of Dundee

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

The nature of knowledge and evidence in child protection social work
Findings from the literature and practice

Kelly, Lynn

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University of Dundee

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Ged Kelly, he taught me to question everything. I am also very fortunate to have parents who have always supported and encouraged me. I also want to thank my family, Stewart, Faith, Wayne, Lewis, Dylan and Max. You fill my life with joy. Stewart, I know you don't understand how something that doesn't include any tricky sums can be proper academic work, but your patience and perseverance have been much appreciated.

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Statement of authorship

I declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and unless otherwise stated all references cited by me in the thesis have been consulted. The work, of which this thesis is a record, has been done entirely by me and has not previously been accepted for publication for a higher degree.

Name: Lynn Kelly

Signature:

Date:

Introduction

This thesis presents a body of work for the award of the Professional Doctorate in Education. The work is presented in two parts. These parts demonstrate my learning, research and practice interests, and reflect my personal and professional development over of a period of six years. The central themes of this thesis are professional learning and knowledge transfer. These themes are critically examined in the context of how social work child protection professionals learn. Traditional ways of knowing and learning are no longer adequate. Professionals are facing increasingly complex practice issues that take place within an ever-changing social and political landscape. The role of the professional social worker is under constant scrutiny, nowhere more so than in the field of child protection, where the media plays a pivotal role in setting the political agenda (McCulloch and Kelly, 2007).

The nature of professional learning and in particular, child protection social work learning, is captured at various junctures in this thesis as it grapples with the key tensions, debates and conflicts. The thesis positions these challenges within the context of the literature and provides an alternative theoretical lens from which to consider alternative approaches.

The future of child protection social work and the protection of vulnerable children and families rely on the skills, experience and knowledge of those charged with working with them. In this thesis I will posit that current methods of education and continuing professional development are failing. New methods and models of sharing knowledge between all who have a stake in child protection, need to be reconsidered. For this to occur, we need to reconceptualise the theory that underpins our current approach and recognise the barriers that prevent the effective transfer of knowledge across the domains of research, practice and service user knowledge and experience. This thesis will conclude that this can only be achieved through the active and informed participation of all stakeholders.

Thesis structure

This thesis is presented in two parts. Part One contains the empirical project entitled 'The nature of knowledge and evidence in child protection social work: Findings from the literature and practice'. This study constitutes 60% of the award. Part Two contains my Claim for Recognised Prior Learning (RPL), which constitutes 40% of the award. This claim includes my degree of MSc.in Applied Social Research, which was obtained from Stirling University and provided advanced entry onto the doctoral programme, equivalent to 20% of the programme. This degree is recognised by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) as providing a robust research methods training programme for doctoral candidates. The other 20% is comprised of two academic papers, which were published in peer-reviewed journals. Statements outlining my contribution to each paper have been prepared and signed by both of my co-authors and these are included in the appendices to Part 2 of this thesis. The entire RPL claim has been mapped to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and has been approved internally by the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education. The feedback from the internal assessor is also contained in the appendices to Part 2 of this thesis.

A bridging paper has been included to outline how the two parts of the thesis relate to each other and how my learning has developed throughout this process.

The Bridging Paper

This paper outlines the key themes and concepts that draw together the different sections that constitute this doctoral submission. The professional doctorate has been designed to reflect the emerging and often disparate areas of learning that professionals undertake during their careers and as part of their ongoing professional development. This model of learning has allowed me to capture several strands of my social work practice expertise as well as the connected, but independent, strands of the teaching and research that I have been engaging with as an academic since joining the University of Dundee in 2007. The act of reflecting on this learning has afforded me the opportunity for deeper reflection on a process and journey that I first embarked upon in the late 1990s, when I completed my master's degree at Stirling University. This process has highlighted that the journey is far from over, and that the completion of a doctoral degree is in fact only another, albeit important, step in this continuing journey.

My primary focus as an academic is to support those professionals who work directly with children and families in order to make a positive difference to the lives of the people they work with. As a researcher and teacher, I aim to do this through my own on-going professional learning and by doing research that is relevant, accessible and useful to practitioners. My own practice utilises research and I am mindful of the consideration of how best to share my experience and results. I work collaboratively with a wide range of professionals and am learning all the time about the obstacles that prevent them from doing child protection social work that makes a difference.

I consider my professional identity to be continually shifting and growing. I am fortunate to have been able to work with people who continually challenge me to grow and learn. Giddens (1991) discusses the concept of self development as something that is constantly evolving, and as being mediated through social contact and expert knowledge. This view recognises that knowledge is something that is revisable and not fixed. Making sense of new knowledge and

the impact of changing social and institutional contexts requires high levels of reflexivity, or what Giddens calls ‘self-interrogation’, and is an essential component of my identity as both a practitioner and an academic (Giddens, 1991:76).

Until embarking on my PhD at Stirling University, I had been seeking knowledge and ‘evidence’ about practice from academic literature in the belief that research knowledge and practitioner knowledge were somehow different. I now recognise my error in believing that academic research had a higher status than practitioner expertise. The view that academic research is somehow more robust, reliable and trustworthy than practitioner knowledge is something that I return to in my empirical study in Part 1 of this thesis. The concept of knowledge and how it is shared across the domains of research, practice and the public sphere is central to all the component parts of this thesis including my claim for recognised prior learning (RPL). My interest in how practitioners make use of, and engage with knowledge and evidence, has brought me to the conclusion that practitioners can and do make good researchers. This has been one of the most important lessons from my doctoral journey, and has strongly influenced my approach to my empirical work.

My background

I qualified as a social worker in 1986. My professional career has been in two substantial areas of social work practice, child protection and working with convicted adult sex offenders. I was a senior manager in child protection in both the UK and Australia, and was the manager of a large sex offender intervention programme in Dundee for many years. It was while working with sex offenders that I first began to be interested in how I could better utilise research knowledge and literature for the purposes of developing not only my own practice, but also the work of the professionals that I was managing. In the early 1990s, little had been written about social work practice with sex offenders, and my employers offered to support me to return to my studies with a view to contributing to this knowledge base. On completion of my master’s

degree, I was awarded, through a process of competition, a Faculty Studentship to undertake a PhD. My research topic was the examination of how sex offenders are represented in the print media and how this impacted on social policy in Scotland. Although I made the successful transition to doctoral candidate through the transfer of ordnance mechanism, I was unable to complete my thesis due to family circumstances.

The themes outlined in this thesis have been evolving and developing over many years. In this time I have completed several research projects. Recently, I have co-led a research project that has identified the views and experiences of the children, young people and families who have been involved in the child protection system in Scotland. The final report from this research will inform child protection practice in Scotland through various dissemination events. Two academic papers based on the findings of this research have recently been submitted to two British social work journals. I have also presented the findings at a national conference. While the dissemination of the results of this project may inform the wider practice and academic community, my co-author and I understand that these formal academic platforms exclude many of those who might be interested in our findings.

Recently, as part of a small research team, and acting as the Principle Investigator, I have been awarded funding to evaluate Police Scotland's National Child Abuse Investigation Unit. Again, this work will be of national importance and will inform national strategy and policy in relation to how Police Scotland undertakes child protection investigations. Another recent study examined the use of video as a mechanism for supporting vulnerable families, and the implications for child protection. This research has contributed a unique perspective on child protection practice that will inform the multi-agency Video Interactive Guidance practice community. Conference presentations of this work were highly commended as they offered an important and as yet under-theorised perspective on this important area of practice.

In January of this year I was jointly awarded the University of Dundee 'Stephen Fry Award for Excellence in Public Engagement and Research'. This award

celebrates the sharing of the world-class research and is given to University of Dundee researchers who have made the greatest contribution to public engagement in the past year. This award was given in recognition of the work that I have done as a key member of the Faculty for Inquiry and Review Studies (FIRST), which is part of the Centre of Anatomy and Human Identification. This work included the introduction of a new method for reviewing child deaths in Scotland.

In 2011 I was awarded the Journal of Social Work Education, Jo Campling Award for my doctoral studies. This prestigious and highly competitive award was given to doctoral candidates who were carrying out research into learning and teaching within social work education.

Since moving on from direct practice into the university environment, I have maintained a very keen interest in both child protection and criminal justice social work. This is represented by my ongoing professional work as a member of the Scottish Social Services Conduct and Registration Committee, an Associate Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland and as a recently appointed member of the Parole Board for Scotland. I also continue to work as a social work practitioner, and have recently conducted and co-authored a Serious Case Review into the death of a young person in a North London Borough. This work will have a significant impact on how agencies work together to identify the risks and dangers associated with gang membership within the inner London Boroughs.

The roles outlined above represent high levels of professional recognition. As a researcher, I consider myself to be growing in confidence and recognise how my professional practice has informed my research. This transition from practitioner to academic researcher has been hugely rewarding and I have to thank my doctoral supervisors for their encouragement and support, as they have given me confidence to consider myself as capable of being both a practitioner and an academic, while never having to choose between the two.

The empirical study

The empirical component of this submission equates to three modules of the professional doctorate. It became clear that a triple module would be necessary in order to fully consider the implications of the study within the context of contemporary literature and to allow me locate these findings in a new conceptual framework. My work in this module started as a relatively straightforward examination of the perceptions that my postgraduate child protection students held about the role of evidence-based practice in relation to their daily practice. These views were gathered by means of a thematic secondary analysis of student assignments. These assignments were selected from two cohorts of students, four years apart. However, my growing interest in this topic required me to further develop my original thinking to include the wider socio-material context in which this practice arose.

As Programme Director of the Postgraduate Certificate in Child Care and Protection, I introduced a module entitled 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice' into the programme. Initial demand for this module was high and this reflects the interest in the topic both from students and from their employers. More recently, the popularity of this module has diminished as the child protection agenda has shifted to other areas, most notably, risk assessment and inter-professional working. It has been interesting for me to observe that, while I have been reading around the topic of evidence-based practice, initially focusing on literature available in traditional social work publications, interest in evidence based practice was diminishing within my own student cohort. This lessening of interest in the topic of was not reflected in the literature. At this time, and partly by coincidence, new areas of academic interest started to emerge for me through my work with the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) Postgraduate Diploma in Policing Studies. I was invited by Professor Tara Fenwick, Associate Director of SIPR to become a member of a newly created research network for police education in Scotland. This network provided me with the opportunity to consider my own epistemological position in relation to professional learning. Despite being responsible for the delivery of professional learning programmes of study, and identifying myself as an

professional who is continuously learning, this was not an issue that I had previously given much thought to. Fenwick's work revealed to me that the relationship between my personal beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the nature of learning was important to my conceptualisation of professional learning.

There has been a paradigm shift in the literature away from learning as information processing and systematic, towards a more complex picture of learning being complex, situated and adaptive and divergent. This understanding led me to consider the context of my empirical study in a wider, more socio-theoretical context. My work within the SIPR network has also afforded me the opportunity to more fully consider how knowledge is exchanged between research, practitioner and the public. The concept of evidence is clearly contested, but so too must be the notion of the 'expert'. While traditional critiques of evidence-based practice recognise these tensions, they do not offer alternative solutions or approaches. The need to effectively share knowledge, both between and across the professions, has never been greater. However, to do this effectively, we must develop methods of sharing knowledge that best suit the different social and material contexts in which practice and learning takes place in each of these different professions.

In relation to my own learning, this new understanding has made me aware of the importance of properly understanding the process of knowledge transfer in all its complex dimensions. In particular, I am interested in how academics embark upon knowledge generation and the knowledge transfer of their research findings. The work that I have been doing with the FIRST has demanded that we find new, more adaptive and creative methodologies that encourage the co-production of knowledge between researcher, practitioner and service user. If we are to be genuinely interested in making a difference, we must commit to finding better ways of communicating what we do to as wide an audience as possible. To do this effectively, we must find ways of working in partnerships that recognise the social, political and material inequalities that exist and how these can distort our understanding of what knowledge and expertise is. Knowledge is never static and can reside within everyone at

different times. Our challenge is to recognise this and to begin to have the meaningful dialogues that can result in genuine knowledge transfer and learning.

Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) claim: Journal articles

Two journal articles have been submitted as part of my RPL claim. The first paper is entitled 'Working with sex offenders in context: Which way forward?' (McCulloch and Kelly, 2007). This article considers how practitioners and the public come to understand the behaviour of adult male sex offenders, and recognises that policy and practice occur within the highly charged environments of the media, politics and public opinion. The article argues that a more informed and critical debate would lead to a more considered approach to policy and intervention. The themes that emerge in the second paper, 'Fit for purpose? Post-qualifying social work education in child protection in Scotland', reveal a paucity of debate as to what constitutes good child protection education. This paper specifically highlights the lack of consensus about the sort of skills and knowledge a competent child protection professional needs in order to do their job effectively (Kelly and Jackson, 2011). As authors, we argued that practitioners should be utilising their own practice as a form of evidence and source of reflection. We put forward the view that practitioners require advanced levels of analytical skills and research literacy and organisational support, to be able to identify and synthesise research evidence in ways that are relevant to their practice. This theme is returned to in my empirical study, where I argue that we need to consider more critically the individual, social, political and cultural contexts that support or inhibit professional learning.

Conclusion

This bridging paper is longer than intended, but I feel that this was required to adequately draw together the themes within this submission and to properly reflect my learning journey. The thesis documents an evolving journey and demonstrates aspects of my progress over a considerable number of years. I

have found the process challenging in many ways, particularly in terms of the personal time I have had to invest in the process. I have discovered that the world of research is far from perfect; it can be messy and chaotic (Clark, Brody, Dillon, Hart and Heimlich, 2007). There are no perfect methodologies and researchers are not always objective and dispassionate. But, ultimately, it can be inspiring and revelatory. Despite many years in social work practice, the research projects that I have been involved in have revealed new knowledge and understandings that have, at times, challenged my previous assumptions and at other times, confirmed for me that my knowledge as a practitioner was as valid and reliable as that of a 'researcher'. I have discovered the importance of being 'authentic' in my work. I am confident in owning my views but am also open to having them challenged. I have also become more actively engaged with the ethical dimensions of my work, which has strengthened both my research and practice. However, for me, the most important lesson has been that there are no perfect answers in research and that knowledge and experience can always be contested.

As a university teacher, I believe that it is incumbent upon me to strive to attain the doctoral award, and as a practitioner and mature student I can only hope that my efforts can motivate some of my students to have the confidence to embark upon this route for themselves as a way to furthering not only their own careers, but as a vehicle for generating knowledge and learning that will hopefully make a difference to the lives of those with whom we work.

Part 1: The nature of knowledge and evidence in child protection social work: Findings from the literature and practice

Abstract of the Empirical Study

This study captures the experiences of social workers based in Scotland who are engaged in child protection practice on a daily basis. By considering the complex relationships that exist between child protection practice, learning and research, the study challenges existing approaches to professional learning. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as socio-materialism, actor network theory, social network analysis and complexity theory, and recognising post-recession socio-economic conditions, it is suggested that new approaches to professional learning are now required in order to properly understand and engage with the complexity of the world of work, learning and doing.

The study is informed by the views of 36 postgraduate qualified social workers active in the field of child protection. These professionals completed a module entitled 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice', which formed part of a postgraduate childcare and protection certificate. A content and thematic analysis of the assignments written by these students revealed that evidence-based practice is not an effective method for transferring knowledge within health or social care work settings. Barriers to accessing traditional forms of evidence, such as research literature, are manifestly difficult to overcome, with personal, social and organisational barriers being particularly difficult for professionals to navigate by themselves. Brown *et al* (2009) comments that the level of information given to line managers to help them support learning is important, it remains that despite the rhetoric about social service organisations becoming learning organisations, it is clear from the empirical evidence that there is still much to be done to actively encourage the creation, sharing and evaluation of new knowledge within social work child protection in Scotland.

The literature, however, offers an alternative framework that could provide new ways of engaging with professionals, so that they can become more confident, skilled and effective in accessing and generating new knowledge. However, these new approaches require a paradigm shift in how we think about professional learning. We can no longer view this learning as merely information sharing, but instead need to recognise it as something that is much

more complex. Professional learning is, in fact, situated in practice and within organisations, and is informed and mediated by the social and political cultural contexts in which people work. It therefore requires learners to be adaptive, divergent and creative. This new understanding provides the framework on which to build an alternative approach to professional learning that recognises the wider socio-material context as well as the personal attributes of the learner and service user. This demands that we develop alternative, more adaptive and creative methodologies that encourage co-production of knowledge between researcher, practitioner and service user.

Key words: Professional learning, evidence-based practice, child protection education, social work education, knowledge transfer, knowledge translation, knowledge exchange, work based learning, socio-materiality and actor network theory and co-production.

Chapter 1: The Literature

A habit of basing convictions upon evidence, and of giving to them only that degree of certainty which the evidence warrants, would, if it became general, cure most of the ills from which the world is suffering (Russell, 1957: vi-vii.)

This chapter will begin by outlining the method adopted for planning and scoping the literature for this review. It will discuss the approach adopted for analysing and collecting the documents that have been included, and also excluded, from the search. Relevant literature was identified through a search of relevant professional bodies' publication sites, government documents and electronic research databases, and additional citations were collected via the reference lists of identified sources. The chapter will then go on to discuss the identified literature and will conclude by drawing together the key themes that have informed the study.

1.1 The purpose of this review was to:

1. Explore current literature relating to professional learning, evidence based practice and knowledge transfer and to explore how theories such as socio-materialism, actor network theory, social network analysis and complexity theory might provide a useful lens from which to consider the barriers that exist in relation to how practitioners gain access to and share knowledge.
2. To discover what the barriers are to the effective sharing of knowledge between all of those involved in the generation and dissemination of knowledge and evidence in child protection social work.

1.2 Literature review methodology

The link between the literature review and the empirical research included in this chapter is not traditional. By this, I mean that in most cases the literature normally informs the empirical study, at least in relation to identifying the research aims, questions and the methodological approach. In this case, the process was different. I conducted an initial scoping of the literature that related specifically to the use of evidence-based practice (EBP) in social work practice but, as the study progressed, I expanded this literature to consider critical perspectives on professional learning and knowledge transfer. The unpredictable nature of research means that it is not until you start reading that you discover that other relevant areas exist that can further develop the theoretical and conceptual premise of the original research, thus enhancing the findings and subsequently the relevance of the research to the field under study. This reflexive approach to existing literature and research demonstrates my awareness of the ways in which the researcher is an individual, with a particular social identity and background that can and does impact on the research process.

In order to identify the scope of the literature and research studies that should be included in this review, it was important to identify the key questions that the literature must address. These questions are closely linked to the research questions as outlined in Chapter 2 of this study. The key questions for the literature review were as follows:

1. What is the nature of professional learning?
2. What is the status of evidence-based practice in child protection social work and other related caring professions?
3. How has knowledge transfer been developed in related caring profession disciplines?
4. How have strategies for EBP or knowledge transfer impacted on the generation and dissemination of new knowledge, research and practice?
5. What conclusions can be drawn that would inform child protection social work?

With this focus in mind, it became clearer how links could be made between the papers that were selected and where the missing links were. There was a wide range of literature relating to the professional learning and it was important to limit this to a manageable format. I therefore decided to focus on more critical perspectives that resonated with my own teaching practice and experience.

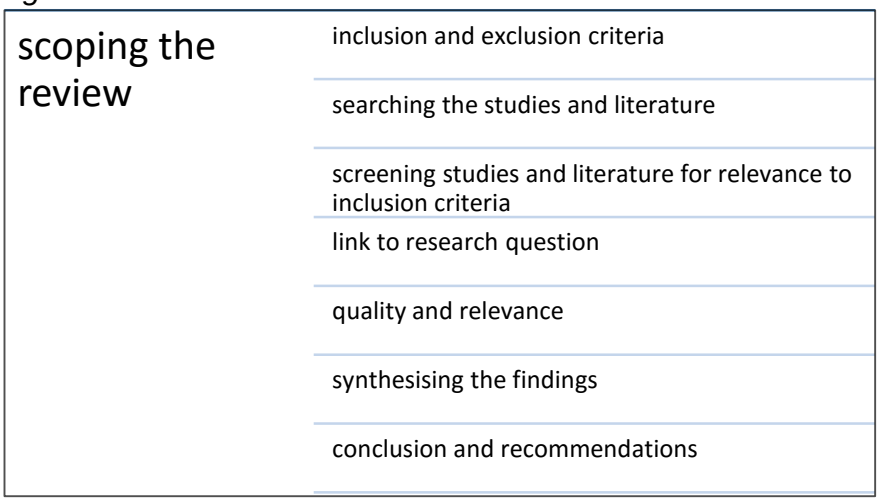
The scope of the review is immense, both in relation to the potential fields of inquiry and also in relation to the timescale, therefore focusing on the questions suggested by Wallace and Wray (2006) was very helpful and enabled the review to remain relevant and contemporary while demonstrating a breadth of knowledge and understanding of a complex and multi-faceted research and practice area.

The initial scan of the literature involved reading abstracts and conclusions from a wide variety of disciplines. In developing a process for refining the search, I adapted the five critical synopsis questions of Wallace and Wray (2006): what is the purpose of reading the article; what are the writer's aims; what is pertinent to what I need to know; am I persuaded by the authors; and of what value is this to my study?

1.2.1 Planning the search strategy

This literature review is not a systematic review in the traditional sense and as outlined by Gough (2012). However, I have adopted elements of this approach to ensure that the review is reliable and robust. Most of the studies included in this review have been qualitative in nature, although I have included studies that have adopted a quantitative and mixed methods approach. The inclusion of a wide variety of studies ensures that the review does not fall into the trap of being reductionist in scope, a criticism that can sometimes be levelled at systematic approaches to literature review (Maclure, 2005). Figure 1 outlines the process that I undertook to ensure that the process of reviewing previous studies and literature was transparent and robust.

Figure 1 Flow chart to illustrate method of literature review



I adapted the methodological approach to systematic literature review, as outlined by Davies *et al* (2012). This adapted method ensured that the review was systematic and that the final conclusions and recommendations for practice, policy and research could be considered reliable. The following process was adopted:

The literature and research studies must relate directly to one of the research questions and should include aspects of the following:

1. Literature to be relevant to professional learning

2. Literature to relate to evidence-based practice in social work and other caring professions
3. Literature to consider the voice of the practitioner in relation to understanding of EBP or professional learning, organisational support for professional learning or EBP and knowledge transfer.
4. Literature must be based upon empirical research (either qualitative or quantitative). The methodology of the research upon which the literature is based must be made explicit (e.g. sample sizes, instruments, analysis).
5. The findings upon which the literature is based must be valid and reliable, taking into account the type of study (adapted from Davies *et al*, 2012:81).

1.3 Sources used

A number of databases were searched including: SCOPUS, Sociological Abstracts, ASSIA, Web of Knowledge (Social Sciences Citation Index), Intute, Cochrane Library and Google Scholar. These databases were selected as they host relevant literature and research for this review. As outlined above, sources were also obtained from the institutional pages of specific authors and organisations. In order to further refine the search categories, 'Boolean operators' were applied with care. This was found to be helpful in eliminating data unrelated to the search. Searches were conducted using specific words, terms and authors. It was also important that the review included the works of those authors whose work in this field is considered to be seminal. However, titles of articles, abstracts, journals or books might not contain words that would necessarily identify literature from these important sources, therefore it was necessary to search for specific authors by name as well.

1.4 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Figure 1 outlines the general process that I adhered to when searching for the literature. Table 1 outlines the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that I applied to further refine the search.

The search was limited to published papers and professional policy documents that were written in English. The search initially focused on the application of evidence-based practice to social work, but the scant literature and my professional interests dictated that the search was widened to include professional learning, knowledge transfer and relevant theoretical frameworks. The review of the literature revealed a gap in relation to the application of alternative models of knowledge transfer in social work. While a few papers were relevant, most focused on critiquing the relevance of the application of evidence-based practice to the field.

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion are outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review

Inclusion Criteria	**Rationale**
Literature written in English	No access to translation services and the cultural and social context of social work varies in different countries
Published peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed papers	It was not assumed that all relevant knowledge would be available in only peer reviewed published literature.
Date of publication: all relevant from 1980 up to 2015	A longer term context was appropriate for the nature of the study, to ensure seminal works were included
Policy and government documents	These were selected in relation to demonstrating policy context for evidence-based practice and knowledge transfer in social work
Books, both hard copy-checked/ and electronic	A lot of practice literature is contained in textbooks, as opposed to academic journal articles.
Practice literature	To identify how evidence-based practice and knowledge transfer is understood by practitioners
Recognised and trusted sources	Given the nature of the topic under review, it was important to remain focused on literature that came from professional or accredited sources. I did not, therefore, conduct a general “Google” search
Organisations that provide professional education for social workers or others involved in child protection	These would provide important practice knowledge
Exclusion criteria	**Rationale**
General web searches	The nature of the topic necessitated the use of trusted web sites and databases
Literature not written in English	Difficulties in translation and professional context
Adult learning	This field is too broad, and would require a level of psychological context that did not merit inclusion

1.5 What the literature tells us

This study captures the experiences of social workers who are based in Scotland, who are engaging in child protection practice on a daily basis. The students had enrolled on the University of Dundee Postgraduate Certificate in Child Care and Protection and elected to undertake the module entitled 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice'. Initially, this study intended to simply report the experiences of trying to embed an evidence based practice (EBP) approach into their daily practice. The study looks at the experiences of two cohorts of students, all of whom are qualified social workers, separated by four years of study. However, when considering the literature and the results of the study, it became clear that the findings needed to be located within the wider context of professional learning and knowledge transfer. New socio-economic conditions have also necessitated different approaches to professional learning, and new theoretical perspectives are now required to properly understand and engage with the complexity of the world of work, learning and doing. We are now witnessing a notable decrease in funding for professional development (Thomas and Qiu, 2013). It is argued that increasing demands for privatisation, target-setting, performance management, competency measures and an increase in regulation appear to have reduced education to something that can be measured within the domain of the individual and to the belief that teachers are responsible for ensuring that this learning occurs in the correct way. This instrumental approach to learning is manifestly unsatisfactory given the complexity of adult lives and adult working lives in particular.

This review of the literature does not set out to provide a definitive overview of the literature relating to adult learning. It is, instead, an overview of aspects of various but interconnected literatures and theories that speak critically to how professionals learn while working, and how new knowledge can be created and transferred across all stakeholders in the domain of child protection practice. This approach is informed not by traditional psychological perspectives that view the professional in the context of the individual or, more recently, the organisation, but moves to position itself within a wider social, political and

material context where professionals, viewed as actors, are considered to have agency over their own learning, only in the context of other human and non-human actors. This approach has been influenced by a range of theories, such as Actor Network Theory, Social Network Analysis and Socio-Material perspectives to inform my thinking and to explain the data as expressed by the students in their assignments. I have not adopted any one single theory to underpin this study, but rather have drawn upon those that I believe have utility in terms of the context of the study and the working lives of the students who completed the assignments from which the data were extracted.

In the professional context, work is often referred to as practice, and the work of Bourdieu (1984) will be used to inform our understanding of the concept, as it recognises both the role of the individual and of the social environment in which their practice occurs. At the heart of Bourdieu's argument is the notion that practice and learning should be understood through three interlinked themes: field, capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979). The *field* is held to refer to the network in which the practice takes place and practitioners exert their position and expertise. *Capital* refers to either social capital, such as resources, networks and relationships, or cultural capital, such as qualifications, all of which can provide advantage. *Habitus* refers to the worldview of the individual, such as our motivation and our disposition towards learning, all of which can be influenced by our social and cultural capital. This view is useful in the context of child protection practice, as it suggests the relative position of practitioners, which in turn highlights the hierarchies and inequalities between practitioners within organisations.

Professionalism, as a sociological construct, remains highly contested and traditional sociological perspectives on the role of the professional and the professional group have found the work of the professional to be different to that of non-professional workers. The profession itself was viewed as self-regulating and not reliant upon managerial interventions to ensure good practice. According to Evetts (2011), this view is changing. Despite the increasing use of the term by individuals and organisations, professionals are increasingly finding

themselves working under stricter scrutiny, with ever diminishing discretionary powers (Evetts, 2011; Kelly and Young, 2014) and therefore not self-regulating. Against this backdrop, I would argue, lies an increasingly complex professional world, where public/private worlds are less clear and the boundaries between the professional and non-professional are becoming increasingly blurred; I will expand on this further in this section.

1.5.1 Challenging traditional approaches to professional learning

Learning can be conceptualised in many ways, but is increasingly being viewed as a form of participation and a process of doing and becoming, through engagement in social life (Perkins, 2013). This framework requires us to pay attention to not only the social, but also the institutional structures and the inherent power dynamics that exist within these bodies (Perkins, 2013). To best understand this context, we need to adopt a cultural approach to understanding learning. Defined as 'the social practices through which people learn' (James and Biesta, 2007:30), learning cultures demand that we recognise not only the social practices that determine the learning culture in different organisations, but also the ways in which this impacts on students as learners. Crucially, learning becomes viewed as a social practice, taken to be 'thoroughly practical and involv[ing] not simply the human mind but the living human being in continuous interaction with its environment' (James and Biesta, 2007:30).

Traditionally, professional learning has taken place in the context of uni-professional values, expertise and a shared understanding of role and behaviour. Sociologists have viewed professionalism as ‘a distinctive and different way of controlling work and workers’ (Evetts, 2011:29). Reflecting this notion of social control, Kaban and Smith (2010) also consider that the differences between the professions could be largely attributed to social class and expert and accredited knowledge, thus maintaining clear boundaries between existing professions. However, our understanding of professionalism is changing, as most now find themselves no longer working in a uni-professional context, but increasingly in large-scale organisations and multi-

professional workplaces, and quite often in international contexts (Evetts, 2008; Evetts, 2011; Evetts and Malcolm, 2011; Fenwick, 2014). This shift towards an inter-disciplinary and international context of work is now challenging previous theories, which had predominantly been focused on the difference between Anglo-American and European contexts of professional work. Collins (1990:98) highlighted the differences between 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Continental' models of professionalism. Continental models depicted the state as the main actor while, in the Anglo-Saxon model, professionals tended to be self-employed practitioners who had the freedom and discretion to control their own work conditions.

Evetts (2008) argues that we are now witnessing greater degrees of convergence between these models and that Collins' theory is out of date. Evetts (2008) goes on to describe some of the consequences of this shift towards a more dynamic and less defined model of professionalism as presenting new challenges both to the relationship between the individual professional and their employer, and also in the nature of the relationship between the professional and their client, where new priorities and processes need to be established. This new understanding should not, however, be seen as a complete shift away from the need for strong professional identities and the discrete knowledge base that different professions possess. While it is clear that a multi-professional stance is required in order to address the complex task of keeping children and young people safe today, collaboration between professionals is not without its own challenges (Laming, 2003; Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011). Dalley (1993) highlights issues of organisational tribalism and, of course, there is the risk that professionals will reduce their understanding of how other professionals work, and what they know, to stereotypical constructs that limit the true potential of the inter-professional relationship (McCallin, 2001). Additionally, it is important to recognise that with increasing moves towards multi-agency working, the difficulties in sharing knowledge and understanding grow. Allen, Hyde and Leslie (2012) stress the importance of understanding the different cultures and internal systems that exist within organisations. Leischow *et al* (2008) suggest using a systems level approach to encourage organisations

to view themselves as part of a common, larger system. This, they suggest, would also assist in the facilitation of knowledge transfer across silos. While there is some merit in considering a systems based approach to knowledge transfer, it is in my view an over simplistic perspective in that it fails to recognise the knowledge barriers and cultural and personal aspects that inform professional knowledge acquisition and methods of knowledge transfer.

Understanding the sociological power and status dynamics inherent in our professional hierarchies is, of course, vital when considering the risks inherent in child protection work. However, the key to ensuring that professionals from different professions can work effectively together is to ensure that they have opportunities to work and learn together, and to be given opportunities to co-produce new knowledge together. Crucial to ensuring the success of this alternative approach to inter-professional working is the commitment of the organisations in which professionals work. The centrality of the organisation highlighted by Evetts (2011) distinguishes between occupational and organisational professionalism, viewing the former as embedded within a common value base, enjoying discretion and trust from the public, while the latter can be defined by managerialism, standardisation and target setting. If we are to produce professionals who are fit for the challenges and complexities of child protection practice (or indeed other complex professional areas of practice, such as health and policing), and who can work across traditional boundaries and establish new ways of knowing and working, it becomes imperative that understanding these complex and often contradictory issues, and grappling with their ethical and practice implications, should be at the heart of their professional education (Kelly and Young, 2014).

In the past, professionals were viewed as having special knowledge and skill and it was believed that they should therefore be trusted to administer their knowledge and use their skills with minimum interference and few externally imposed rules. However, within the domain of child protection, the privileged status of the professional has been strongly challenged, and the implications of

this for their work and sense of value and status need to be properly considered and understood in relation to those shared tasks that they are required to perform in order to protect children. Spaces need to be created where these tensions can be effectively shared and understood, but a key place for this debate to occur is within the core professional qualifying programmes. Unfortunately, despite the emphasis on inter-professional working and training within the academic literature and government policies, it remains on the periphery of qualifying programmes and post-qualifying education. The lack of status that is given to inter-professional learning can only be improved if this is supported at the highest levels from within the organisation, and is properly recognised by funders, regulators and educators (Kelly and Jackson, 2011).

Prior to 1985, professional learning was characterised as a form of individual acquisition, where the 'knowledge' was seen as something that could be transferred between people, a form of transaction, with little consideration given to the impact of the new knowledge on the practitioner or how individuals might interpret it. Notions such as 'construction', 'self-directed learning' and 'reflection' did not emerge until the end of the 1980s, while concepts such as 'the learning organisations' did not appear until the 1990s (Fenwick, 2008b). Around this time, we also began to recognise that learning could be something other than just the acquisition of knowledge by individuals and could also be conceived of as a collective experience, and with this understanding we witnessed the emergence of the community of practice model as first outlined by Wenger (1998). This concept positioned the act of learning as something that occurred in a situated way, that is, learning is something that occurs as part of the act of 'doing' and that all participants in the community become active co-producers of knowledge within that community. Mulcahy (2012:122) states that it is in fact 'practices that produce learning'.

More recently, complexity theory has offered another lens through which to view the process of learning within and between networks and actors, recognising as it does the dynamic and complex systems in which people work and learn

(Hood, 2014). Bennett (2010) represents complexity as the non-linear relationship between people and context, and the nature of this association or 'assemblages'. Central to our understanding of complexity is the notion of 'emergence', where complex systems of humans, relationships and non-humans emerge together to form new inter-connected systems. Complexity science is highly heterogeneous and is used in many disciplines, most recently in education and social work. Fenwick (2012a) and Stevens and Cox (2008) state that all complex systems are learning systems and, in order to better learn, we need to be able to better understand the nature of the complex environments in which learning takes place. However, Fenwick cautions against some of what she refers to as the more 'romantic and naïve notions' of complexity science, such as the belief that all organisms will self-organise.

Despite the progressive nature of our understanding of professional learning, and the recognition that responsibility for learning does not rest solely with the individual, Fenwick (2012a) recognises that even these new models fail to address the power and status issues that come into play within organisations and communities, which can exclude or exploit people and their access to learning. Questions begin to emerge that challenge what needs to be known and by whom, and this challenges the status of those who have traditionally determined these questions. It is argued that professionals quickly learn to recognise these power differentials. They then come to understand their own role and function in an organisation or community and subsequently come to present themselves in ways that conform to these assigned roles, therefore impacting on the potential learning opportunities within the system. It is with this in mind that we need to begin to re-consider our approaches to professional learning.

1.5.2 Actors, material and the social world

Recognising the need for new ways of conceptualising professional learning, ANT offers a useful lens from which to consider the ways in which social

relationships, professional networks and non-human objects, such as technology and organisations could impact on the ways in which professionals learn. While ANT does not directly underpin the conceptual framework for this study, it has provided some interesting concepts from which to consider the data, recognising as it does that learning is something that is social and situated in nature and cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place.

ANT can be best described as a material-semiotic approach that draws inspiration from the symbolic-interactionist method of understanding the social world. In short, ANT is a way of analysing heterogeneous relationships and networks by understanding that people behave towards each other and things depending on the meaning that these people or things have for them, and that this meaning is derived from their social interactions. Meaning is therefore critical to understanding reality, and reality is an enactment of social relationships and networks that includes all forms of actors including objects, subjects, machines, organisations and the social and political environment in which these relationships take place, including inequality and issues of power.

ANT therefore challenges the view that learning should be reduced to something that is intrinsic within the individual, but rather directs us towards something that is situated within a social world. ANT steers us away from categorising learning as merely a list of criteria or competencies, towards thinking about learning as something that is collective, situated and interactive, where knowledge can be co-constructed between actors and materials (Mulcahy, 2012; Law, 2009). This collaborative approach shifts the focus of learning from solely the individual towards the individual within a social context. This recognition of the social context of learning also includes a recognition of the institutional contexts in which people work (Lattuca, 2002). Understanding the institutional elements of professional learning are vital in relation to considering how new learning might become embedded within the institution, and when considering how expert knowledge can be transferred or exchanged between those professionals working within the institution. Leander *et al* (2010:330) view learning as something that is mediated and 'not contained within individual minds, but rather distributed across persons, tools and

environments'. This recognition of material artefacts and the social aspect of learning recognises that the communication or transfer of learning occurs across the various domains of the learning system or community, and must be taken into account when we consider the learning environment and how it might be enhanced. This emphasis recognises that the skills required for learning demand that people actively engage with their social environment, and it is through this social interaction that we come to 'know'.

While taking us forward in our understanding of the complexities of professional learning, the 'communities of practice' model still assumes learning to be exclusively human (Mulcahy, 2012). Adopting an ANT approach, Mulcahy talks of the 'more than human dimensions' of professional learning (Mulcahy, 2012:121). Learning comes to be conceptualised as a performative knowledge practice constituted and enacted by people and tools in complex assemblages, where we come to understand professional learning as more than something that an individual does. Challenging the established individualised, psychological perspective, where learning is primarily seen in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of people, ANT forces us to recognise the influence that both the social and the material have in relation to professional learning. By simultaneously considering the human and non-human actors, we render false the traditional dichotomy between 'professional knowing (education) and doing (work)' and make explicit the forms of power that influence traditional professional learning domains (Mulcahy, 2012:121).

While ANT acknowledges the influence of the social and the material, social network analysis (SNA) is a useful tool to assist us in considering the role of the social networks in professional learning (Hossain and Fazio, 2009). SNA maps out how actors interact with each other in organisations or in society and makes explicit patterns and networks of communication and interactions, social groupings, friendship, and group behaviours as they take place over space and time (Merchant, 2012). The map of these networks gives insight into the relationships and can help us identify who the key actors are in terms of transmitting new information, and the gaps in the network that prevent its

transmission (Pow, Gayen, Elliott, and Raeside, 2012). Traditionally SNA has been used within sociology to research groups that are hard to reach, such as sex workers and drug users (Latkin, Forman, Knowlton and Sherman, 2003), but Pow *et al* (2012) suggest that despite the usefulness of the approach, care needs to be taken to also consider its limitations. These authors point to the fact that those on the margins of society are always going to be cautious about revealing their contacts and, indeed, networks can reveal the structural inequalities and divisions in our society. This argument also holds true for professional networks, where some professionals might find themselves struggling to engage with new knowledge and may be just as reticent about both engaging in new networks and in revealing their own networks, or indeed their lack of professional networks. We therefore need to consider which people 'make visible their social networks' (Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes, 2009:255).

With this in mind, the educator or researcher may only have partial information about the relationships at play and needs to consider the possible significance of these unreported or missing actors. Similarly, SNA was not initially conceived to consider professional networks, and therefore does not offer an adequate account of the organisational and management aspects of professional networks. Despite this caution, SNA, in line with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), provides an alternative to the view that the personal attributes of the individual, such as their level of influence and character, are more important than the relationships and links with other actors and the strength of the networks that they engage in. By emphasising the interdependence of individuals, SNA and ANT can act as a bridge between these micro- and macro-sociological problems and can demonstrate for us how the relationship between both material and non-material actors works.

Recognising the importance of the material assemblages which mediate our social learning, Fenwick (2010a) highlights that the interplay between the human actors and their material and non-material world needs to be properly considered, and ANT and other socio-material perspectives provide useful viewpoints from which to better grasp the inter-connectedness of these

domains. The interplay between the human and the non-human or 'material' becomes an interesting ontological lens through which to consider professional learning, and one that speaks directly to the importance of the changing and evolving spaces in which professional practice and learning occur, the places and spaces in which learning occurs and the material that is required to enable the learning to take place. This shift in emphasis, from the primacy of the role of the teacher, to a more sophisticated perspective that includes the socio-material aspects of education, helps us to better understands the place of materials such as text, technologies, institutions and space, in the learning process. This approach does however demand that attention be paid to the material conditions in which professionals learn, and consequently shifts responsibility from the teacher and individual learner back to the institution and those who can control or influence the social and material world in which learning and practice need to take place.

The assumption that learning can occur in a linear, didactic way has now been rendered redundant. New ways of engaging the learner, assembling the materials and constructing the spaces in which learning can occur in a meaningful way are now required. This approach recognises that we are dependent and not independent actors, but rather act as part of wider networks that are equally informed by both human and non-human actors. Law (2008:643) describes the process as the 'commitment to practice and the stuff of the world' and a recognition of the 'how things happen', rather than simply the 'why things happen'. This complex relationship between people and tools has been further refined by Greenhough (2011) as 'performative knowledge practice'. Both Greenhough (2011) and Jackson (2015) reflect on the influence of Foucault in the consideration of ANT, particularly in relation to the need for multiple 'gazes' and the nature of power, where the 'gaze' is a not a reductive tool, but rather a realisation that people are 'irreducible'(Foucault, 1989).

Realising that humans exist in a network of relationships, both human and non-human, where the social order is continually being negotiated and redefined, we begin to see power within society as something that is not located within the individual, but as something that is negotiated and 'distributed between actors in

a network and arises as a result of the collective action of the actor-network' (Jackson, 2015:13). We can therefore see that human action alone is not sufficient to ensure coherent societies or networks: objects provide the structures in which human engagement takes place. In relation to adult learning, we can imagine an extensive list of non-human actors, including such objects as universities, colleges, libraries, technology, texts and so forth. More widely, the network can include the organisations in which people work, the regulatory requirements for training and education, and the cultural, social, fiscal and political environments in which practice takes place. While being mindful not to become enmeshed in the potential minutiae of possible contributory material factors, we can clearly see that professional learning is not a simple linear relationship between the cognitive capacity of the individual and their ability to understand what is required of them, but becomes a complex interrelated web of power relationships between all actors, both human and non-human. This understanding allows us to question who or what determines the nature of professional knowledge, controls the mechanisms for accessing this knowledge and sets the standards for acceptance and recognition within the profession.

While this study does not claim to utilise ANT or SNA to inform the design of this study, the key concepts outlined above have been considered in the context of the analysis of the data as they provide a useful framework for considering and naming the more abstract concepts that are contained within the data.

1.5.3 Knowledge, learning and practice: continuing professional development in child protection

Within Scotland, child protection work occurs inside hierarchical public sector organisations (Drumm, 2012). The nature of these organisational spaces and their relationship with those who work within them needs to be properly understood, to ensure that the findings and recommendations of this study are relevant and reliable. The empirical component of this study begins with the premise, albeit a contentious one, that the socialisation that occurs within these organisations does not adequately support professional learning, and that a

disjuncture exists amongst professionals and organisations about the nature of knowledge and practice.

Developing a culture of learning is a key factor in the success and sustainability of knowledge transfer in organisations. The concept of a learning organisation isn't new, and attempts have been made to try to better understand the nature of the key characteristics of learning organisations. Iles and Sutherland (2001:65) outline five principle features of a learning organisation as follows:

- an organisational structure that enhances opportunities for employees and encourages service user involvement;
- an organisational culture that promotes openness, creativity and experimentation among staff;
- supports information systems that move beyond monitoring and control;
- adopts human resources that recognise people as creators and users of organisational learning;
- has a leadership style that is aimed at securing significant organisational improvement; and recognises that organisational learning depends heavily on effective leadership.

However, when Michelle Drumm from the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) reviewed this literature, she concluded that: '*…cultural change occurs over time and time is required to successfully embed changes in practice*' (2012:7). Drumm went on to consider cultural change in social service organisations, and made suggestions about the sorts of indicators that could suggest that change is occurring. Unfortunately, none of these recommendations referred to professional learning. The imperative to work collaboratively in child protection practice further adds to the complex landscape of professional learning for this group of professionals (Kelly and Jackson, 2011; Laming, 2003; Munro, 2011). Learning in this context is not just about working together with other professionals, but also working with those who are receiving the service, either voluntarily or under statutory provision. This of course requires professionals to maintain their knowledge base in relation to their practice, but to also learn about the nature of collaborative working and

learning. Collaboration can mean learning the different languages, values and cultures of other groups. Recognising this complex landscape has become a key aspect of academic debate about post-qualifying child protection education for social workers (Davis and Sumara, 2008). Understanding complexity presents us with a new way of conceptualising professional relationships and therefore the context in which professionals learn.

The literature that tries to better understand the dynamic network of relationships that take place within child protection systems is also beginning to utilise complexity theory as a useful mechanism for analysis (Stevens and Cox, 2008). Byrne (1998:1) provides a definition of a complex system as being 'the domain between linearly determined order and indeterminate chaos'. Further adapting the theory, Stevens and Cox (2008) compare families as interacting with one another in ways that are contingent, complex and adaptive. While to the observer the emerging behaviours within the family may appear to be chaotic, it is in fact merely conforming to the laws of complexity theory whereby the sum total of the components bring about a pattern of behaviour that cannot be predicted merely by observing the behaviour of one member of the group. Going on to outline the nature of dissipative structures, bifurcation and attractors, Stevens and Cox (2008:1326) outline a picture of family life that appears to be continually 'on the edge of chaos' but never quite dissolving into complete chaos.

Returning to professional learning, we can now begin to understand the complicated sets of relationships and interconnected networks in which the practice of child protection takes place, and how problematic it is to identify what knowledge is required and what practice skills will make a difference. I will argue that no one part of this system can ever claim to know what sort of knowledge is needed or how this might be acquired. Rather, it is only through collaboration at all levels of the network, between practitioners, organisations, service users, academic researchers and government, can we begin to better

understand what we need to know, who needs to know and how we can access and share this knowledge across the domains of the child protection system.

Social work professional networks, such as IRISS and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) have recently begun to engage with this problem and are now recognising and engaging with alternative models of knowledge transfer. However, no model has yet emerged that can consider what this might look like in practice. IRISS has a mission to 'promote positive outcomes for the people who use Scotland's social services by enhancing the capacity and capability of the social services workforce to access and make use of knowledge and research for service innovation and improvement' (IRISS, 2014). IRISS has a specific programme of work designed around 'evidence informed practice' (also known as EBP), and talks of 'co-production' of knowledge, but continues to rely on EBP as a model for conceptualising the complex process and mechanisms involved in the process of knowledge generation, acquisition, dissemination and, ultimately, on service user experience.

The SSSC has responsibility for the registration and regulation of the social services workforce in Scotland. In considering what they think 'people need to know to do their jobs' (SSSC, 2014) the organisation focuses quite specifically on the qualities professionals need to possess or the knowledge that professionals need to know in order to improve the service user experience. The 'Continuous Learning Framework' is a codified product that appears to rely on a set of competencies to ensure that the social services workforce in Scotland has the knowledge and skills it needs to do its job properly. Providing a 'toolkit' for practitioners and organisations, it appears that the conceptual or ontological approach is one where knowledge is transparent, easily accessed and can be reduced to 'tools' and practice guidance and frameworks. The position of this study is that current models and approaches to how social workers come to know what they need to know in order to provide high quality services is outmoded, and in many ways lagging behind the progress that has been made in other sectors.

Working lives are changing and child protection continues to be an evolving, complex and contested arena in which social work practice must take place. It is no longer sufficient to rely on the traditional taxonomic approaches to education, training and knowledge sharing. There have been calls for increased attention to be paid to developing a new conceptual framework to better understand 'how new knowledge is gained, managed, exchanged, interpreted, integrated, and disseminated' in child welfare systems for some time (Leischow *et al*, 2008: 198), but so far we have failed to conceive of an alternative ontological approach to learning that can adequately address the changing and challenging practice landscape. Child protection is not a uni-professional occupation. We need, therefore, to be able to better consider the complex nature of the task through the multi-faceted lenses of inter-professionalism, service user agency, organisational systems and of course the myriad policy and legislative imperatives that occupy this professional and personal space. While there exists a growing literature base that recognises the difficulties facilitating knowledge transfer across a single institution (see Bjørkman, Barner-Rasmussen and Li, 2004; Reagans and McEvily, 2003), there has been little work done on how this can work across public or not for profit institutions (Allen *et al*, 2012).

Despite the plethora of professional learning experiences now available to those working in the area of child protection, research about how child protection knowledge and practice is shared across all actors in the sector has been largely absent. In social work, EBP has been given a privileged status in relation to methods of sharing or disseminating knowledge across the sector. However, while the problems inherent in this approach have been well rehearsed in the literature, there have been few attempts to consider alternative methods or approaches for ensuring that best practice, knowledge and the enhancement of professional skills are adequately shared and transferred across the relevant stakeholders (Barratt, 2003; Webb, 2001; Sheldon, 2001). Gray and Schubert (2012) do however begin to acknowledge the expanding literature of knowledge transfer and recognise that knowledge production in itself is not enough, and that it is equally important to consider how knowledge is transferred. In order to progress this debate, this review provides an

overview of some of the alternative approaches to knowledge transfer that have been adopted by other professional groups and considers their usefulness in the context of child protection education, research and practice.

1.5.4 Evidence-based practice in a child protection context

The concept of EBP is firmly established within the medical profession emerging as a dominant paradigm in the 1970s in response to Cochrane's criticism of the lack of critical summary (Dunst, Trivette and Cutspec, 2002). The move towards EBP in social work can be traced back to the 1990s when Tony Blair and Jack Cunningham, the then Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary, published their paper entitled 'Modernising Government'. In this they stated clearly that government departments needed to make 'better use of evidence and research in policy making' (Blair and Cunningham, 1999). The creation of the Centre for Evidence-based Practice at the University of Exeter in 1996 underpinned the government's commitment to the EBP approach and reform of social services in the UK.

The original definition of EBP is taken from the medical profession: '... the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current evidence in making decisions about care of individual patients' (Sacket, Richardson, Rosenberg and Haynes, 1997:77). In its application to the helping professions, Stephen Webb refines this description to: '... the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions regarding the welfare of service-users and carers' (Webb, 2001:61).

Tierney (2005) and Smith (2004) wrote that the pursuit of evidence was more than just about the application of research, but a moral imperative in relation to the knowledge base and practice of social work. Furman (2009) however, cautions against such a simplistic interpretation of the social work value base and reminds us of Gordon's (1965:365) observations, 'If knowledge is called on when a value is needed as a guide to action, the resulting action may be unpurposeful'. This point is echoed by Furman (2009) when he cautioned that

we need to be mindful of the privileged position of certain forms of evidence above others, and that in relation to social work values, empirical evidence may, in some cases, prove contrary to ethical practice. For example, an over reliance on empirical evidence can reduce the reflective aspect of social work practice and ignore the views and aspirations of service users who may require additional time and support in achieving their goals. Ferguson (2003) and Ingram (2013) develop this further in their analysis of the social work task as being primarily about the development of empathy and the building of trusting and supportive relationships. The social work task is therefore more than the mere processing of problems and establishing outcomes, it is also about process and relationships and values and ethics. Therefore, attempts to introduce overly bureaucratic codified notions of practice should be resisted.

The relevance of EBP to social work practice therefore remains contested and has led to considerable debate within the profession regarding the nature and function of evidence and knowledge and the relationship between social work values and EBP principles (Gray, 2009; Scurlock-Evans and Upton, 2015). Recognising this tension, Plath (2014) does however appeal for the need for better quality research on social work practice, and for a clearer articulation between this research and practice that can mitigate against the often tenuous links between the two. Plath's (2014:906) study into the relationship between social worker clinical decision-making and research evidence or EBP draws upon the 'five-step clinical decision-making model'. The 'Five Steps' consist of the following: formulation of an answerable question; identifying the evidence; rapid critical appraisal of the evidence; applying the evidence and finally evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the response (Sackett *et al*, 1997). This model supposes that the practitioner defines a practice question in the same way that a researcher would outline their research question, and then try to identify the evidence that would best support their intervention. While this approach might be of value within a medical scenario, it is unlikely to provide sufficiently nuanced or contextualised answers to social work practice scenarios. Plath (2014) reveals that the reality of social work practice is that is it most often delivered in partnership with other professionals and, of course,

that the service user has a role in the change process. This author believes that there is 'inadequate attention given to team and systemic decision-making', and that the role of the organisation, the pattern of interprofessional working relationships and the complexity of human interactions are most often not considered in traditional EBP approaches to social work practice (Plath, 2014:906).

Nutley, Walter and Davies' (2007) research takes us beyond the view of EBP as something that is individualised to include a consideration of the organisation and management. Nutley *et al* provide three alternative models of EBP that take us further than the Five Steps Approach, as outlined above, and include not only a 'research-based practitioner' model but also the 'embedded research' model and an 'organisational excellence' model. The last two models consider not only the evidence base for particular interventions, but also the organisational issues such as the political and resource allocation dimensions of practice and, equally importantly, address the need for ongoing critical reflection in order to ensure the intervention was appropriate and in accordance with service user priorities (Nutley *et al*, 2007).

Munro, in her seminal review of child protection in 2011, still advocates that EBP is relevant to practice but cautions that this cannot be at the expense of professional expertise and knowledge (Munro, 2011). The task of child protection social work is complex and must reflect these relational and contextual processes that inform social work practice (Plath, 2014). These issues are not new, as Ferguson highlighted in 2003, when he claimed that the notion of EBP is contested with uncertainty around the meaning of terms such as 'excellence' and 'best practice', and the role of the organisation in operationalising and implementing these models of practice (Ferguson, 2003). Ferguson's response to these dilemmas was to advocate what he termed a 'critical best practice' (CBP) model of intervention, which draws upon a strengths-based approach as an alternative to a deficit model, where the lessons learned are gleaned from practice failures. While this positive approach to practice is welcomed, Ferguson's (2003) vision for CPD, that is, the

development of a comprehensive body of analytical work that would cover all human and social problems and forms of social care interventions, is not compatible with our contemporary understanding of social work practice or of the organisational and political context in which social work practice occurs. While Ferguson (2003) acknowledges that there can be no one single method of engagement and advocates that there can be several options for intervention, it does still remain that the social work task can never be reduced to merely utilising the 'evidence', and that families or service users can never be defined solely by their particular set of problems.

More fundamentally perhaps, we need to consider how we come to gather the evidence that informs practice. Accessing knowledge about what social workers do and know is incredibly difficult. For researchers to understand and to evaluate what forms of knowledge and intervention work best, there is a need for the practitioner themselves and, of course, the service user to be able to articulate clearly what occurred between them and how this moved into practice in action. This understanding is something that can be translated across other relationships and practice scenarios, and requires not only skills in analytical thinking and conceptual framing, but also technical skills for measurement and evaluation and the time and organisational support and resources to ensure that this task becomes part of daily practice. Without addressing this problem, social work evidence can only ever claim to be partial, biased, subjective and specific, bound by time and place and individual interpretation. In short, unreliable and not transferable. Social work evidence requires more than practitioners who are research-literate and knowledgeable about contemporary approaches to practice. It requires a workforce that is actively engaged in the process of generating knowledge and actively contributes to its dissemination and translation in all aspects of its daily interaction with colleagues and service users.

Rosen (2003) raised concerns about the lack of evaluation in relation to how EBP has been implemented in social work, and reports that he was not aware of any social work practice where EBP had been implemented or evaluated. He cites a lack of tools and social workers' lack of analytical thinking and decision-

making skills as part of the reason for this gap in our understanding. This thesis goes some way towards addressing this gap by utilising significant data from practitioners who were actively engaged and supported in the activity of EBP, and brings a new focus to our understanding of the ways in which our current conceptual frameworks fail to adequately address the problems facing practitioners today in their search for relevant knowledge upon which to inform their practice. I am mindful here of Drury-Hudson's (1999) model for depicting the interrelationship between different forms of knowledge, of which she cites the following types of knowledge: theoretical, personal, practice wisdom, procedural and empirical.

In our own teaching, we drew upon the Shlonsky and Gibbs (2004) model of EBP (Figure 2) and compared this with Drury-Hudson's model (Figure 3) that outlined a model of professional knowledge as the inter-relationship between EBP and decision making is not always clear in social work practice and these models provide a useful lens from which to consider the issues.

Figure2: Evidence-based practice model (Shlonsky and Gibb 2004:136)

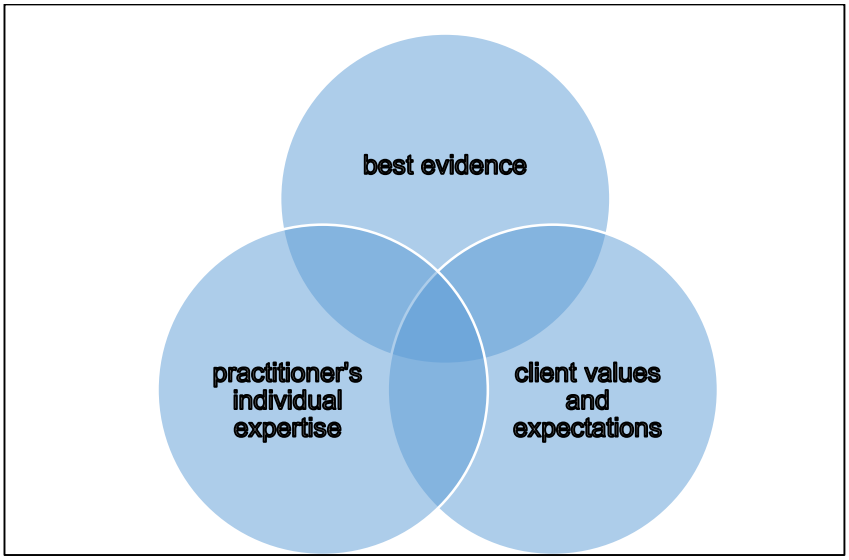
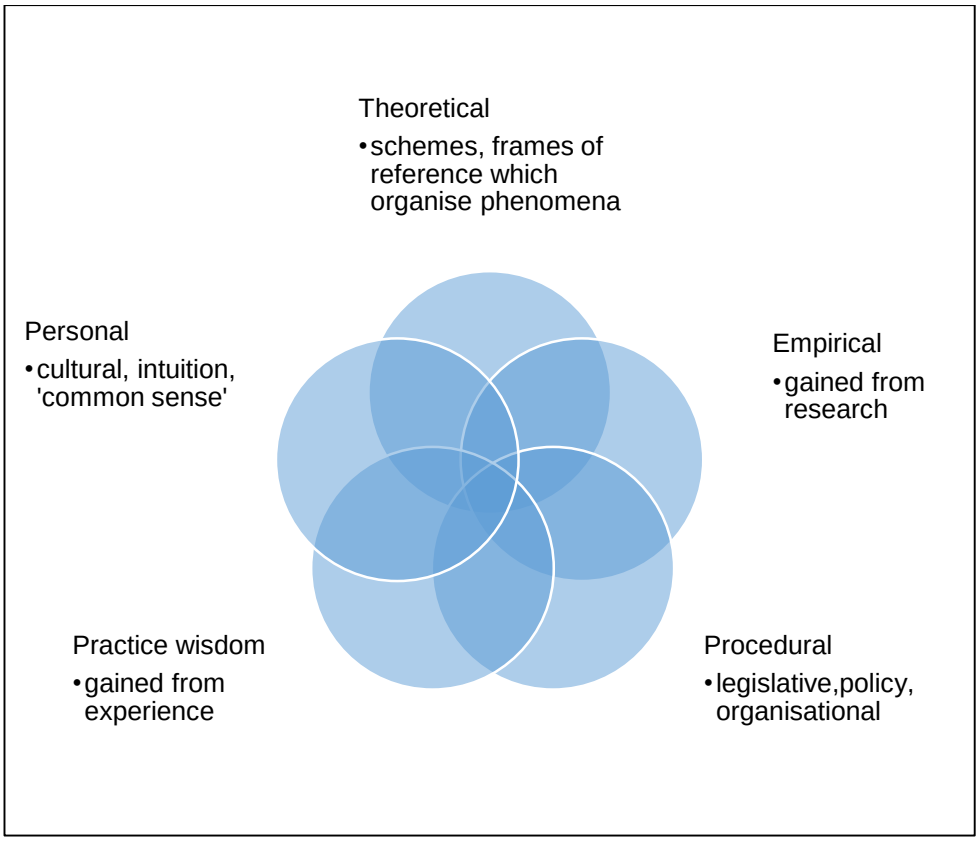
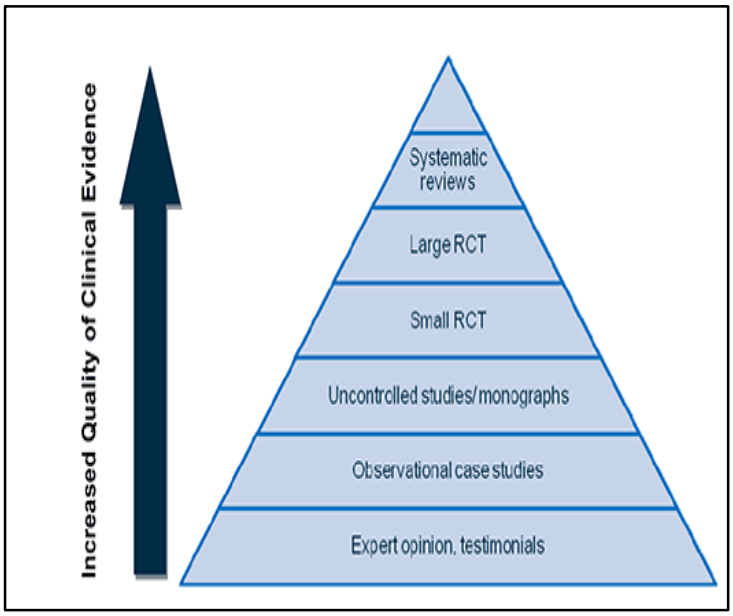


Figure 3: A model of professional knowledge (Drury-Hudson 1997:150)



Both models appear emphasise the interrelationships between different domains of both evidence and experience. However, while both models acknowledge the equal status of practitioner experience, in reality practitioner experiences is considered to be a less reliable form of knowledge when compared to more traditional academic empirical research. I will return to this in the findings and conclusion of this thesis, but it does demonstrate a flaw in the EBP approach, that despite acknowledging process and the interconnectedness of different types of knowledge, it appears that some forms of evidence are more privileged than others as suggested by Furman (2009). Figure 4 outlines the nature of this hierarchy of evidence, and enables us to consider how it might be difficult for practitioner wisdom or service user experiences to be given equal status to other more formal types of evidence. We can therefore conclude that while the spheres outlined by both the Shlonsky and Gibbs model and the Drury Hudson model advocate for the equal status of remain more privileged than others.

Figure 4: Hierarchy of Evidence from a Health Research Perspective



*Adapted from Guyatt, Sacket, Sinclair, Hayward, Cook and Cook (1995)

This hierarchical understanding of knowledge, which places emphasis on positivist paradigms, renders itself of limited utility within professional practices that focus predominantly on the human experience, which is complex and dynamic. Drawing on literature from nursing, which shares with social work a similar set of professional characteristics, including a holistic approach to practice, Polit (2008) and Nevo and Slonim-Nevo (2011) suggest a more inclusive approach to the nature of evidence for practice, which recognises not only quantitative research but also practice expertise, case studies and other forms of knowledge that utilise a more relativist or subjective ontological position.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has published two reports (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long, and Barnes, 2003; Walter, Nutley, Percy-Smith, McNeish and Frost, 2004) as part of their 'Knowledge Review Series' that focus on the role of research and the nature of knowledge within social care services. These reports provide useful overviews of the relationship between social care research and the actual work of practitioners, including a consideration of the

role of organisations in supporting the use of research by their staff. In the report by Walter *et al*, (2004), entitled 'Improving the use of Research in Social Care', the authors draw upon the earlier report 'Types and Quality of Knowledge in Social Care' (Pawson *et al,* 2003) which outlines a framework for classifying knowledge in social care as follows:

- *Organisational knowledge:* knowledge gained from organising social care, through governance and regulation activities.
- *Practitioner knowledge:* knowledge gained from doing social care, which tends to be tacit, personal and context-specific.
- *User knowledge:* knowledge gained from experience of and reflection on using social care services, which again is often tacit. Within this review, user knowledge is termed service user knowledge.
- *Research knowledge:* knowledge gathered systematically within a planned strategy, which is mostly explicit and provided in reports, evaluations and so forth. In this review, evidence is defined as empirical findings from research.
- *Policy community knowledge*: knowledge gained from the wider policy context and residing in the civil service, ministries, think tanks and agencies. (Walter *et al*, 2004: viii).

From this framework, the authors outline three models for research in social care, that is:

- the research-based practitioner model;
- the embedded research model;
- the organisational excellence model (Walter *et al*, 2004:25).

The models outlined above provide an interesting conceptual framework for considering the links between research and practice and the status of different forms of knowledge or evidence, however the authors go on to report that none of the models properly consider the knowledge of the service user. While models might seek the views of service users or the organisations that

represent them, none place their views at the centre of their approach. Also, very few studies actually measure research outcomes in terms of changes in outcomes for service users. Walter *et al* (2004) conclude that future research needs to be done to properly consider how the use of research actually impacts on outcomes for service.

Returning to the place of EBP within child protection social work, Munro (1998) suggests that social work has an 'anti-scientific ethos', with a lack of empirical basis to support the effectiveness or otherwise of much of the theory and frameworks that are adopted by practitioners. She goes on to suggest that this lack of empirical evidence has led to a workforce and practice framework that does not adequately utilise the research. Scurlock-Evans and Upton (2015) argue that this problem persist today. In a recent publication, these authors provide a comprehensive overview of research findings that seek to understand social workers' attitudes and knowledge around the concept of EBP. The authors uncover high levels of misunderstanding and confusion about the nature of EBP and suggest that further studies need to be carried out to explore what EBP means to social workers, and the barriers they face in trying to implement this approach. I will argue that this confusion about the concept of EBP reveals something more fundamental than just confusion about what is the most reliable research or practice framework. At the core of this dilemma is a sense that child protection social workers do not themselves understand what aspects of their practices are effective and which are not and why. There is also a lack of clarity about what roles service users themselves have in a child protection context where notions of participation are contested. In a recent study of how children and families came to understand the child protection system, Jackson and Kelly (2014) argued that in circumstances where service users are involuntary recipients of statutory services, notions of service user inclusion and participation become wickedly tricky and that the ideas of inclusion and participation become controversial and contested. Drawing on French and Raven's (1959) seminal analysis of power, Ryburn (2006:87) presents the argument thus:

> ‘In the child protection field professionals almost always possess the additional capacity to impose their will as a consequence of a mandate granted to them in legislation. Thus, within the constraints imposed by the bureaucracy in which they work, they enjoy a power to reward, to coerce, to make legitimate or to punish.’

Hence, it can been argued that ideologies of inclusion and participation which overlap within child protection social work practice with notions of partnership working and empowerment (Corby et al., 1996) represent a ‘theory for which there is no praxis’ (Ryburn, 2006:91). In this context it is argued that where the rights of children to be protected from harm are continuously being balanced and brought into conflict with the rights of parents, professionals find themselves walking a decision making tightrope where issues of evidence and experience become enmeshed in the complex narrative of risk and protection.

An additional layer of complexity arises with the demands of interprofessional working, (Akister, 2006; Crawford, 2004; Hood, 2014; McLaughlin, 2013). Munro (2011), suggests that we must acknowledge the as yet has added that interprofessional working has a tendency to focus on the process of professional working, at the expense of the voice of the child and parents. Interprofessional working does not address the autonomy of the application of moral and ethical choices, nor does it properly recognise the role of ‘self’, relationships or indeed the place of the organisation, in one’s practice. These ethical and practice tensions are not unique to the child protection social work nor are not widely discussed in the literature but they do suggest that we need to know more about what it is that social workers do, what it is that they need to know and how this manifests itself within a sound moral and ethical framework for practice. It is hoped that this study goes some way to contributing to this understanding.

It is these dilemmas and uncertainty around the child protection social work task that makes the discussion about the role and utility of evidence and knowledge complex. In some areas of social work practice, such as criminal justice, there has been a significant shift towards the application of research and applied criminological theory to the development of work with offenders. Trinder and Reynolds (2000) suggest that the approaches that have been adopted by the 'What Works' project have been strongly influenced by research that draws upon large-scale meta-analysis with insufficient consideration given to the application of such findings to the individual offender. Evidence may suggest that a particular approach may be effective but it is not, and should not be accepted that any approach will always be effective in every given scenario. To conclude, while there is a strong case for the judicious consideration of research evidence within child protection, the complexity of the task and the moral, ethical and legal requirements of the task render it immune from prediction and codification. The challenge therefore is not for social workers to be become more evidence based in their practice but for the evidence to become more practice informed in its inception, development and subsequent application.

With the above in mind it is still worth considering the tensions that arise for social workers when considering what tools they can draw upon to assist them in their complex task. EBP does not in itself provide the panacea to all practice dilemmas but the barriers faced by social workers when trying to identify tools to assist them in their practice become illuminating. I will argue that the barriers outline in the next section reveal a lacuna in the debate about the nature of the role of evidence and knowledge within the profession.

1.5.5 Barriers to implanting evidence-based practice in social care work

It is generally accepted that for research evidence to have an impact on social work practice and policy, five key things need to happen: (1) agreement on the nature of evidence, (2) a strategic approach to the creation of evidence and the

development of a cumulative knowledge base, (3) effective dissemination of knowledge, together with the development of effective means of access to knowledge, (4) initiatives to increase the use of evidence in both policy and practice, and (5) a variety of action steps at the organisational level (Kitson *et al*, 1998). From this list it appears that the implementation of social work research faces barriers at all stages. Barriers to implementing evidence into practice are well known in the literature and will not be rearticulated here in their entirety. However, one of the most common and perhaps surprising issues is the psychological barriers that impede dissemination. Bellamy *et al* (2006) refer to these psychological barriers as knowledge barriers. Knowledge barriers reflect the lack of skills and awareness that practitioners often experience in relation to accessing, understanding and critically evaluating research findings, (Mullen and Bellamy, 2008; Mullen and Streiner, 2004). These findings are similar to those outlined by Peterson *et al* (2011) and Cree *et al* (2014) where their students reported a similar lack of confidence in relation to their analytical skills but also noted that their limited access to high quality research literature made the task of locating relevant evidence problematic. The reality still appears to be that that few practitioners' access scholarly journals and, even when they do, many find them difficult to translate into their practice setting.

Another related but equally important barrier is the time lag that it takes for research to be published. Thyer (2004) puts the time lag at about three to four years, but Bellamy and colleagues suggest that in some cases there can be a fifteen-year lag between the research taking place and the publication of the results (Bellamy *et al*, 2006). While the time lag represents a significant barrier, it is also concerning to note that social workers often feel that the research and evidence does not in fact reflect questions that social workers need answered. However, Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) suggest that the root of this problem can lie in social workers' difficulty in actually formulating questions that have knowable answers; this of course speaks to a lack of critical thinking skills that has been outlined above. Nationally, with IRISS for example, the focus of research dissemination networks has been the development of web-based facilities and resources, yet access to information technology varies enormously across social service organisations, and many practitioners have little or no access to digital resources (Barratt, 2003).

Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) outline and pose still relevant counter arguments to many of the barriers that are raised in relation to EBP, but the overarching problem appears to be a lack of fit between what social workers consider themselves to be doing and what the evidence presents to them. They go on to say that this is often apparent in the disjuncture that often exists between policy and practice, where social workers are expected to conform to methods of engagement that are not supported by the evidence. Bellamy *et al* (2006) suggest that some practitioners feel that research evidence is simply a cost-cutting tool, and politically motivated to save resources (also see Gibbs and Gambrill, 2002 for fuller discussion). This inherent disconnect between the outputs and aspirations of researchers and what practitioners need continues to be problematic (Landry *et al*, 2001a). Practitioners appear to want guidance that is tailored to clients and practice, but research data is most usually generalised to larger populations, and therefore is less specifically applicable to the practice scenario. Gibbs & Gambrill (2002) also state that practitioners believe that researchers are only interested in publishing findings that will enhance their reputation and are less interested in the routine work of daily practice. It is clear that in order for EBP to be more relevant to practitioners, research needs to take on board the material, political and cognitive contexts in which social work is routinely practiced. Barratt (2003) presents the challenge succinctly when she suggests that in order to flourish, evidence must be 'multifaceted, broad-based and carefully targeted'.

The question about the validity or otherwise of EBP in the context of child protection social work is clearly contested. EBP is fundamentally an academic debate about the nature of knowledge and what constitutes knowledge in a formal academic sense. While acknowledging the need for a robust evidence base for social work practice, this is not a problem that is unique to social work, or indeed the social sciences. There will always be academic debates about the forms of knowledge that the academic recognises and privileges, what is however worthy of study is the ways in which knowledge can be transferred meaningfully across all agencies and actors that seek to influence the domain of social work knowledge. By better understanding these mechanisms, we can begin to understand the true nature of the social work task in all of its complexity and begin to consider how to use this to best effect in the services

that are delivered. This approach must recognise contributions from academia, the field, policy makers, decision makers the public and, of course, from service users. To begin this process we must look to the work that has already begun in other equally complex and contested fields of practice.

1.5.6 Knowledge Transfer and Implementation

Knowledge transfer considers the processes and mechanisms that allow research and practice knowledge to become embedded in practice. In the context of social work, this recognises the complex relationships between researchers, practitioners and service users. McWilliam (2007) described the process as:

‘an ongoing interactive human process of critically understanding relevant, quality research results and findings, whether factual or tacit knowledge or humanistic understanding, blending this broader research-based knowledge with experiential knowledge and contextual appreciation, and constructing a shared understanding and knowledge application to advance the quality of care’ (McWilliam, 2007:203).

As in many other academic disciplines, there tends to be a huge time lag between the generation and implementation of new knowledge (Gray and Schubert, 2012). Drawing on the ‘new theory of knowledge production’ in Gibbons (1994), Gray and Schubert describe how Gibbons’ theory was not about finding new methods for doing research, but rather about finding new ways of approaching research. Social work as a profession is being continually challenged to demonstrate its usefulness, and engaging in debates about knowledge production and transfer are now highly relevant. The growing empirical base for knowledge translation also provides an interesting perspective on the ongoing debate in social work about the role of evidence and research in practice and the apparent reluctance of social workers to engage with the research community (Gray and Schubert, 2012:204). Traditionally, social work has tended towards thinking about research in relation to its applicability to practice, where knowledge is generated or produced by

academics and applied by practitioners. Alternatively, knowledge translation science encourages us to consider the generation of knowledge in a wider context, including not only academic knowledge, but also interprofessional and service user knowledge, essentially representing a more participatory and egalitarian model of knowledge generation. Adopting a knowledge translation approach would effectively shift the emphasis from the narrow interpretation [of] evidence-based practice models that have come to dominate the social work debate, to include practice-based and service user knowledge or what Alexanderson, Beijer, Bengtsson, Hyvonen, Karlsson and Nyman (2009) call a 'synthesis of knowledge'.

Knowledge is a key strategic resource of any organisation and researchers and practitioners strive to better understand how to maximise their knowledge base. Successful organisations are today considered to be those that can create new knowledge and effectively disseminate and integrate it quickly into their work (Hammami *et al*, 2012). While the construct of 'evidence-based practice' (EBP) is well rehearsed and indeed debated with in the social work literature, there is, as yet, only limited literature regarding how knowledge can be generated and shared across child protection practice, research, teaching and service user experience (Johnson and Austin 2008; Bellamy *et al*, 2013b). It is to the more efficient and effective strategies for dissemination of evidence that we now turn.

The emerging issues within child protection social work regarding knowledge transfer resonate with other similar professions. These issues include the need to ensure a stable and well-informed workforce, how to enhance mechanisms that support inter-agency working, how to cultivate an ethos of service innovation, how to better embed research into practice and how to most effectively evaluate and share knowledge that emerges from practice. In Scotland, all qualified social services workers and employers of social service staff are regulated by the SSSC and are required to adhere to their Code of Practice. The code outlines for employers that they 'must provide training and development opportunities to enable social service workers to strengthen and develop their skills' (Code 3 for Employers). Similarly, social service workers are required to 'be accountable for the quality of your work and to take

responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills' (Code 6 for Workers). However, the apparent contradiction of striving to achieve targets and deliver predetermined outcomes within tight timescales and the need to identify, collate, analyse and implement the research data makes for a problematic relationship between EBP and practice. The need, therefore, to identify some form of compromise that addresses the needs of practice, while ensuring the relevancy of academic research, is imperative if child protection social work is to progress in an effective and efficient way. The current climate of inspection and scrutiny, both from the public via the media and by public bodies such as the Care Inspectorate in Scotland and Ofsted in England, demand that these tensions are articulated and addressed in a timely way.

Government funding cuts to the public sector means that professionals and organisations must now consider how to harness and upskill themselves and their current workforce. This should also include consideration as to how to better share resources and knowledge and developing more effective partnerships with higher education so that research becomes more relevant, informed and timely (Cribb, Disney and Sibieta, 2014). This, of course, means that organisations need to take seriously the need for staff training and ongoing education, and professionals themselves must make firmer commitments to their own ongoing professional development. This commitments of course will all require access to up-to-date knowledge and training and education to ensure that staff can make better use of the resources that are available. The skills required for accessing and analysing research data and evidence requires professionals to have higher-level cognitive and technical skills. It is therefore suggested that, in order for research and evidence to be properly integrated into practice education and training, we should be recognising the urgent need for more social workers to possess postgraduate level education. This level of education should be seen as a requirement for all those with decision-making responsibility and that this should not be aligned solely to progression and promotion routes (Kelly and Jackson, 2011).

Fenwick (2014a) discusses the nature of professional learning in the contemporary context, and concludes that people coming into our professions

today are competent and confident users of the internet and social media, are less tolerant of organisational structures and hierarchies and have access to large amounts of information and networks. She concludes that the task for employers is to consider how to retain and motivate their workforce so that they can harness the skills and knowledge that they can bring to the organisation. The need to develop research capacity and to understand how to apply it to practice was also stressed as a priority for the future. Interestingly, while writing about police education, Fenwick (2014b) stressed the need for professionals to engage with their communities and other professionals in order to be able to better respond to their needs. This emphasis on building relationships between and across people, communities and organisations is central to the development of the more nuanced levels of understanding and knowledge that are now required to deal with complex professional tasks and relationships in child protection practice. This theme was picked up recently by Smith, Wilkinson and Gallagher, who recognise the importance of relationships within the context of knowledge transfer in social work practice. The authors talk of the need for 'knowledge mobilisation' (Smith, Wilkinson and Gallagher, 2013:292). Drawing upon Ingram's concepts about the role of emotions in social work, the authors suggest that social workers need to engage with the emotional and relational rather than the purely procedural and instrumental dimensions of the task (Smith, Wilkinson and Gallagher, 2013:302).

The skills required to work effectively within and across communities are not dissimilar to those required to access and analyse research literature. Problem solving, decision-making, re-framing and negotiation are all highly applicable within the research arena. Worthy of note is Fenwick's view that it is no longer sufficient to simply train the individual, or for individuals to merely develop competencies, but to consider the 'collective capability' of the organisation (Fenwick, 2014b). Fenwick appears here to be utilising the literature from human development, where the sense of community and collectivism is well developed and where the concept of development is viewed as a process for expanding the capabilities of individuals (Sen, 1985). However, this process is very much dependent on the social and political contexts in which people live. Ibrahim (2006) believes that by emphasising the importance of social structures

and collective agency, we can move beyond individual capacity building to a new form of capability that she refers to as ‘collective capability’. While much of this work is dedicated to better understanding how those living in developing countries can improve their circumstances, this literature provides an interesting lens through which to consider how, under current financial constraints, organisations can more creatively seize opportunities to create new ways of working and learning.

Collective capabilities are more than just an aggregation of individual capabilities, rather, representing something new that can only come about under the circumstances of social collective interactions (Stewart, 2005). Fenwick (2014b) picks up on the potential for collective capabilities to be developed within organisations, where the web of relationships and social interactions shift the focus of opportunities for learning from the individual to the collective body. Drawing on socio-material theory again, it is evident that the relationships between individuals and the material things that exist within the professional context can generate opportunities for a more expansive understanding of professional learning, where all actors, human and non-human, impact on the potential for growth of organisational collective capability, which relies less on the capabilities of the individual and more on the organisational culture, where learning and knowledge generation and dissemination can occur at all levels and across all domains of the organisation.

We can see that learning can and does occur in social spaces and that practice knowledge is above all a social activity involving both human and non-human actors, who all have a part to play in enhancing the collective capability of an organisation.

What has become clear, however, is that the current approach to sharing knowledge and learning in social care is insufficient. Our reliance on the random diffusion and dissemination of research literature is unlikely to adequately inform staff or improve client services, and we now need to consider alternative approaches to creating and sharing knowledge. It is clear that present arrangements for sharing knowledge, such as didactic training courses,

on-line portals, conference presentations, academic journals, policy statements and post-qualifying courses, with their focus largely on the transfer of knowledge, have little impact on the behaviour of social workers (Gibbs and Gambrill, 2002). What we now require is for researchers, educators and practitioners to come together to consider how to more effectively disseminate the rich and growing body of social work research and evidence, so that it can be directly applied to practice.

Social work is not alone in trying to tackle this issue. In considering this challenge in relation to policing, Fyfe and Wilson suggest that the starting point should be to reflect on the knowledge requirement for effective policing. This point is well made in the context of public sector financial cutbacks. However, the authors argue that the needs of policing are much broader than just 'what works' (Fyfe and Wilson, 2012: 307). Advancing this argument, the authors have adapted a framework outlined by Davies and Powell (2010) to suggest that the knowledge needs of policing should include:

- Knowledge about why action is required
- Knowledge about problems so that the nature of the interrelationships between, for example, crime and socio-economic contexts are better understood by practitioners
- Knowledge about what works
- Knowledge about how to put this into practice
- Knowledge about who to involve (Fyfe and Wilson, 2012: 308)

While this model does not adequately consider the agency of the individual or the impact of the material factors on capacity for professional learning to take place, this model is worthy of consideration. The model recognises the complex interplay between all actors in the process and makes transparent its utility in the context of financial constraint, all of which is highly pertinent for child protection practice.

Fazey *et al*, (2014) in their discussion about the role of knowledge transfer in interdisciplinary conservation research, state that it is no longer sufficient to simply just produce more evidence but that we also need to better understand how to bring about change through research and to facilitate new ways of engaging in this process. For this to happen, it is important to firstly consider how knowledge is perceived and problems are framed within a profession or organisation. Approaches to knowledge transfer are strongly influenced by an organisation's epistemological beliefs (Fazey *et al*, 2014). There are definite signs that the relationship between society and science is changing, and the role of the researcher as the sole producer of knowledge is being challenged (Fazey *et al*, 2014; Funtowicz, Shepherd, Wilkinson and Ravetz, 2000). We can see this change of perspective beginning to gain purchase within the social work profession, with moves towards encouraging partnerships between academics, professionals and service users in relation to research and service design and delivery. This move towards forms of co-production can impact on the culture of the organisation, making it more aware of the merits of different types of knowledge.

Within the academic community, this move to a more participatory form of knowledge-building is increasingly being recognised by funding bodies, who now want to see their funds being used in ways that have the highest economic and social impact. This move has become so significant that it has become an area of research activity itself, with fields such as 'implementation science, knowledge translation, knowledge management and research impact' all having emerged over the last few years, with 'knowledge exchange' becoming a particularly well-utilised concept (Fazey *et al*, 2013:205).

Knowledge transfer is not a tool; rather it has been defined as 'a process of generating, sharing, and/or using knowledge through various methods appropriate to the context, purpose, and participants involved' (Fazey *et al*, 2013:20). Knowledge transfer covers a broad range of concepts such as co-production, transformation, integration, social learning and translation, each with a different meaning to different groups (Fazey *et al*, 2013). Knowledge transfer is easier when the knowledge is being transferred between people from the same professional background. However, real opportunities for learning can

occur when knowledge is transferred across different groupings, with different approaches, values and knowledge bases, although we should never underestimate the difficulties involved, and need to be mindful of these when embarking on any programme of knowledge transfer.

While recognising that there is still some way to go to improve communication between academia and other sectors, and a lack of large scale evaluation of knowledge transfer processes in action, there has been a definite shift in the discourse away from hierarchical mechanisms towards a more creative and inclusive approach (Pentland *et al*, 2011). It is now recognised that knowledge transfer is not just about the exchange of knowledge between experts. This positivist perspective is now confined to the more traditional and didactic forms of exchange, such as teaching and writings such as leaflets (Stringer *et al*, 2011). More constructivist approaches view the development of knowledge as something that is social and collaborative in nature, where knowledge is constructed through mutual learning and multi-stakeholder interactions. This means knowledge transfer is not a linear or indeed a two-way process, but rather a complex multi-layered activity. The challenge then is for researchers to be more aware of their epistemological positions, and how these can impact on the design of their knowledge transfer mechanisms. Fazey *et al* (2014) state that currently too much research relies on overly simplistic notions of how knowledge is shared and how people learn, and claim that knowledge is rarely acquired in the ways anticipated in traditional dissemination activities, as outlined in academic research projects. We need to be able to move on from viewing knowledge as something that is the domain of policy makers and researchers, and instead consider how we might better include the wider stakeholder community in more creative methodologies that include making explicit our conceptual framework for such activities. In social work research, it is no longer acceptable to merely conduct research and publish our findings. We are now required to consider how to deliver outcomes that will have a positive impact for our communities. For this to happen, we need to consider how to create more participatory co–production and co-management methods of engagement, with greater attention given to improving systems for knowledge transfer. This is particularly important when engaging in multi-disciplinary

research, where different professions will have different epistemological assumptions about knowledge transfer.

We can see, therefore, that for the transfer of knowledge to be successful we need to pay attention to the key facilitators in professional networks, and this is not the same as identifying the managers and trainers, but instead looking for motivated team leaders, practitioners and service users who can be encouraged to develop the skills required to broker relationships and networks that can encourage knowledge transfer. These skills include understanding group dynamics, working in multi-disciplinary teams, stakeholder engagement and project management, making sense of data and negotiating meaning. McWilliams (2007:72) referred to such people as holding a 'deeply felt interest in research findings', and it is only through the identification of these key people that we can ensure that knowledge transfer becomes something meaningful and long lasting and reflects a wide range of voices.

Fazey *et al* (2014) and Davies *et al* (2000) make the claim for greater emphasis on the evaluation of explicit knowledge transfer strategies. Larocca *et al* (2012) also state that we do not have enough evidence about what forms of knowledge transfer work. However, despite this we do know that we must begin to consider how to better measure the outcomes and impact of our research, and the development of appropriate tools and methodologies will become increasingly important as we strive to tackle the inequalities that currently exist in relation to what forms of knowledge are privileged over others, rendering some voices mute in the process.

1.6 Conclusion

We need to recognise within the current financial climate the increasing levels of stress and pressure on staff and a lack of investment in professional education and training (Cribb, Disney and Sibieta, 2014). This combination could potentially prove to be a lethal cocktail for staff who, since the financial crisis of 2008, have more to do, in less time and with fewer opportunities for reflection and new learning. Never before have we so much needed to find

innovative and adaptive responses to the needs of the profession. We need to create a new workforce for social work child protection that is not only innovative but can confidently face the challenge of the complex and often chaotic lives of the children and families that they work with. Workers need to be intelligent, open to new knowledge and mindful of the knowledge that they possess and can transfer to others. Workers need to be mindful not only of their own values but of their epistemological views, while retaining a sensitivity to the environmental and personal dynamics of the lives of those they work with.

Fazey (2010) discusses the need for 'adaptive expertise', i.e. practitioners who can employ a range of cognitive and personal attributes that enable them to be actively engaged in the process of change, to recognise what they did and why, and to be able to articulate the impact of their actions on others. Developing the capacity for individuals to learn effectively from their experiences is therefore crucial if we are to develop the knowledge and skills of those working within our welfare organisations. Fazey *et al* (2005) have previously argued that before professionals can learn, they need to understand, and this will vary from person to person and can be difficult to articulate. Such personal knowledge is referred to as 'tacit knowledge' which depends on our own unique understanding of the world, and is usually gained through informal mechanisms. Implicit knowledge is usually regarded as being obtained through more formal experiences, but can be influenced by our tacit beliefs (Boiral, 2002, cited in Fazey *et al*, 2005). In order to ensure that learning can occur within organisations it is important that the correct conditions are in place to support it. Leadership therefore becomes central to the organisation's capacity to foster learning, through both informal and formal structures. We can no longer assume learning will 'just happen' (Fazey *et al*, 2005:4). Learning needs to be linked to experience and understanding, and ways need to be found to better consider the ways in which we foster both within social services organisations.

Research continues to have only a limited impact on day-to-day social care practice, and many different reasons are suggested for this, from the difference in values and attitudes that exist between the research community and practice, to the unavoidably imprecise nature of social care knowledge which is consequently undervalued by policy-makers (Plath, 2014 and Scurlock- Evans

and Upton, 2015). An oversimplification of the dissemination and implementation process both misrepresents the process and hampers the search for more effective implementation models (Davies *et al*, 2000). While this statement was written more than a decade ago, I will argue that it still holds true today. Any attempt to better understand the transfer of knowledge from research to practice is still unlikely to include the less formal forms of knowledge such as practice knowledge, service user knowledge or the media. Researchers continue to conduct their research and devise dissemination strategies in ways that will enhance their status within the academy, and have little regard to how they can make a contribution that is relevant and accessible to the practice community. Certainly we have seen professional bodies such as IRISS and SSSC begin to develop their own knowledge transfer programmes, but both continue to rely on evidence-based/informed practice or outcome focused approaches as the foundation for the generation of the knowledge that they want to share. The use of 'Evidence-informed Practice Team' and 'Knowledge Management Strategy' reveal that IRISS is doing little beyond recognising that social media and web-based tools can be useful forms of communication, but do little to address the barriers associated with professional learning.

While recognising the potential for online social networking to contribute to professional learning, as yet we do not know enough to be certain about the extent to which they encourage the generation of new learning (Merchant, 2012). Merchant goes on to argue that, while there may be agreement that learning is dependent on interaction, we should not assume that all interaction results in useful learning; 'Claims that the digital age is characterised by new kinds of learning, although seductive in their appeal, still require empirical support' (Merchant, 2012:15). This hesitancy does not result from a lack of recognition of the advances and innovations that are happening within the digital learning environment, but seeks only to caution its empirical basis at this time, particularly in relation to social work education.

Arguably, for the current social services workforce, the introduction of web tools and social media is unlikely to make any significant impact on professional

learning. With the failure of social service organisations to address the lack of access to technology and the low levels of confidence in their workforce, it is unlikely that digital attempts at enhancing learning will have anything more than minimal impact (Moseley, 2004). Digital approaches also fail to recognise the very real organisational issues that prevent staff from not only accessing technology, but also having the time and support to utilise it effectively (Merchant, 2012). In a similar vein, the move by academic publishing houses to adopt an 'Open Access' approach to academic publications is similarly welcome, but again it fails to address the core barriers that professionals are experiencing in their workplace. For most practitioners, academic research is not just inaccessible, but incomprehensible. Overcoming this barrier will not be simple, but a useful place to start might be the agreement that the evidence that underpins all social work policy and guidance should be rendered explicit. Currently, the principal government policy underpinning social work intervention with children and families, 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (Scottish Executive, 2006a), refers to the underlying theoretical framework methodology for the document as using an 'ecological framework'. Clearly, this is insufficient, and does not render transparent the true extent of the theory and research literature underpinning the policy. This approach could be interpreted as a lack of consideration or recognition of the rights and needs of practitioners to access, analyse and interpret the research and theory that underpins their practice. The lack of visible reference to, or acknowledgement of, the research and theory that underpins government policy also makes it difficult for documents to be robustly challenged. Government agencies and social work organisations must therefore consider how they can better embed an active research culture into their organisations, including embedding practitioner and service user evaluation as a strategy for all policy and interventions. This level of feedback and critical appraisal would ensure that policy and interventions truly reflected what worked best in practice and for those who use public services.

It has been argued that if research is to be relevant to social work practice, then we need to think carefully about the nature of the interactions between all stakeholders. If we are to better understand how we can co-produce knowledge to ensure that a diverse range of voices not only participate in our

research, but offer a multifaceted approach to sharing this knowledge, the nature of the relationships between stakeholders need to be revisited. Despite our attempts, it is evident that much of the knowledge produced by an academy stays within the academy. I would argue that this is no longer a viable option for the future. Gray and Schubert (2012) argue that the production of knowledge is not in itself enough, and that of equal importance, is knowledge transfer and the implementation of relevant findings from research and practice.

Funding requirements aside, there is a moral imperative for those of us working in social work to ensure that our research represents the views of those who not only deliver social services, but those who are in receipt of them. Of course, service user knowledge has existed for as long as welfare systems have been in place, however what is now different is the extent to which practitioners and welfare organisations are required to pay attention to the experience of service users (Beresford, 2000). Continuing, Beresford argues that service users' 'knowledge is inextricable from their experience' (Beresford, 2000:493). For this to become anything other than tokenistic, we need to begin to consider how we can engage in more creative and innovative research methodologies that include the views of service users, from the very inception of the research question through to the design of the study, the data gathering and the analysis and recommendations. While it is recognised that some social scientists are working in this way, for example Fazey; Fenwick and Cree *et al*, there is a need for these approaches to become more common in social work. This will not only enrich our research, but will generate a hermeneutic circle of knowledge and reflection to ensure that we produce research that is not only relevant, but that pays attention to how professionals learn and apply this learning to their practice. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to 'reveal a totality of meaning in all its relations' through a process of interpretation which reveals that which is often obscured (Gadamer, 2004:487). I argue that current social work research all too often omits the voice of those who can reveal the truth and, by failing to properly consider how we generate and disseminate our knowledge, we are complicit in silencing their views and making claims that do little to help our communities and the vulnerable children who live in them.

The evaluation by Fazey *et al* (2014) of 135 peer-reviewed journals from a range of professional disciplines demonstrated a clear correlation between the field of study and the approach to knowledge transfer. The challenge remains therefore for researchers to avoid the temptation to adopt an overly simplistic understanding of knowledge transfer and how people learn, but instead to be alert to their own epistemological views about knowledge and how this impacts on their approach to knowledge transfer and evaluation processes (Qian and Alverman, 2000; Barratt, 2003).

Knowledge translation is a multidimensional concept that requires an understanding of its mechanisms, methods, and measurements, as well as the factors influencing it at the individual and contextual levels, and the interaction between those levels (Sudsawad, 2005). Gray and Schubert (2012) take this further to emphasise the continuum from knowledge production right through to knowledge utilisation. The more we understand the complexity of knowledge, the more likely we are to be able to incorporate a wider range of perspectives that will ultimately lead to more robust and rigorous conclusions (Schommer-Aikins and Hutter, 2002). Our epistemological beliefs are developed in the classroom and, by returning to this key theme, I will argue that social work educators are morally obligated to teach our students that their own epistemological beliefs will influence them. Conceptual change learning is socially constructed, involving both personal and social processes. The extent to which students are motivated to learn, and the social factors that the educator can help bring about in the classroom, will determine the students' capacity for processing conceptual change learning (Qian and Alverman, 2000). It is therefore important that social work educators teach from an informed epistemological stance in order to encourage students to seek their own answers and to develop the critical thinking skills that will allow them to question the authority of published works. Evidence-based practice is ‘seductive in its simplicity’ (Newman, Papadopoulos and Sigsworth, 1998). While this appears as a self-evident statement, the complexity of EBP is often minimised. Popay (2004) concludes that policy makers do not always appreciate the complexity of social research and do not understand that the findings are very much contingent on context. Popay goes on to say that social research is, by nature,

more political and value-laden than medical research, and policy makers are constrained by these factors, which can reduce the weight given to the research evidence when its findings do not suit the political context in which the policy makers are working (Popay, 2004). Plath's (2014) call for research that is more relevant to policy makers and practitioners may go some way to alleviating the tensions between the 'swampy lowlands' of frontline practice (Schon, 1983:42) and 'the linear causal thoroughfares of official discourse' in which processes and outcomes have come to be substituted for the myriad of complex human interactions in social work (Hood, 2014:38).

It is clear then that the production of knowledge itself is not enough to guarantee that even the best knowledge will have any utility in practice. New approaches to knowledge transfer can all provide a useful perspective from which social work can begin to consider more carefully the processes in which formal and informal forms of knowledge become known and shared across all domains of the social work task. However, we need to revisit the current constructs that inform our understanding of how professionals learn together in the work place. The literature presented in this review strongly suggests that we need to move beyond viewing professional learning as something that is personal; rather as something that encompasses the organisational, social, political, economic and material contexts in which professional learning takes place. We need to attend to the meanings that professionals make of the professional contexts in which they work and how this impacts upon them and their practice. We also need to better engage with practitioners about what it is that they think that they need to learn, and what needs to happen to allow this to occur. We also need to recognise the crucial knowledge and experience of those who use social services, as they are uniquely privileged in their perspective. As stated previously, meaning is critical to understanding reality. This is also true in terms of the reality for professionals, and it is through the enactment of their social relationships and networks, including all forms of actors - including objects, subjects, machines, organisations and the social and political environment - that meaningful learning takes place. Without attending to meaning, we never move beyond our current dichotomous relationship between the academy and practice.

1.7 The next stage

This review of the literature provides a solid rationale for the empirical study that follows. The study presented in the next three chapters provides an insight into the views that child protection social workers hold about the relationship between research or evidence and their own practice. By going beyond the traditional literature on EBP in social work to explore alternative theoretical concepts such as ANT, socio-materiality and knowledge transfer theory and research, I have been able to locate the findings in a more robust theoretical framework. I believe that my recommendations are therefore more relevant and workable in practice. I have framed the data in this study in the context of the literature presented in this chapter, and will conclude with clear recommendations for research, policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Design

Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodological approach adopted for this study. Drawing on the literature review, this chapter will provide an overview of the epistemology and theoretical frameworks that have informed the research, including the aims of the research and the subsequent research questions. The chapter will then go on to discuss the design of the research, including a discussion of the ethical considerations, and provide an outline of the aims and content of the module from which assignments were selected for this study. This chapter then proceeds to provide demographic information about the students whose assignments provided the data for this study and details the research instruments that were used.

The bridging paper contained in this thesis describes my relationship to this empirical study. This relationship has evolved over a number of years and has allowed me to explore a range of academic interests that have emerged from my professional career as a social worker and social work academic. I am, therefore, reluctant to label this study as being informed by one particular methodology, rather I prefer to talk of an overall 'approach' that is eclectic, exploratory and broadly qualitative in nature.

2.1 Theory and the research questions

A qualitative research paradigm informed my approach to this study. Qualitative research is a form of social research that is concerned with the ways in which people 'make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live' (Liamputtong, 2013:11). The qualitative paradigm is also one that acknowledges that human experience and understanding can change over time, and may be influenced by social context. My approach was also informed by my desire to make a difference to the lives of the children and young people who are involved in the child protection system. Chapter 1 of this study outlines clearly my theoretical position. I have a critical attitude to the traditional

approaches to professional learning that maintain the view that professional learning is something which is individual and psychological in nature. Instead, I prefer to view professional learning as something that is social and: 'thoroughly practical and involving not simply the human mind but the living human being in continuous interaction with its environment' (James and Biesta, 2007:30). In Chapter 1, I outline the various theories that have contributed to my understanding of the data such as socio-materialism and actor-network theory, both of which locate the actor in the context of the social and political. While these theories have not explicitly underpinned the study, they have provided a useful framework from which I have been able to consider the data. I reiterate my belief that our society is inherently unequal, and believe that this inequality permeates all aspects of our social and professional lives. I also touched upon my more recent understanding of complexity theory in relation to professional learning, where it recognises the dynamic and complex systems in which people work and learn (Hood, 2014). I am particularly interested in the notion of 'emergence', where complex systems of humans and non-humans emerge together to form new interconnected systems. I believe that my theoretical assumptions about the social world and the world of work are consistent with the constructivist approach that I have adopted for my research.

My analysis of the data has also been underpinned by my theoretical position. In order to best represent the voice of the students who provided the data, I have illustrated this chapter with extensive extracts from the assignments and have made explicit my own interpretation of these statements. I do not claim that my analysis is anything other than my own interpretation of the data, but I believe that I have taken sufficient care to ensure that this is dependable and confirmable, by maintaining good records and notes from all stages of my analysis. My methodology is robust and demonstrates that I am a credible researcher, with the necessary skills and experience and academic knowledge to complete such a study. My study has been discussed at length with my doctoral supervisors, in particular, Dr Sharon Jackson. I have engaged in a reflective process with Dr Jackson in relation to this topic over many years as fellow module leaders and researchers on several interrelated projects. This reflective process was vital to ensure that I did not allow any preconceived

ideas or theories to unduly influence my interpretation of the data. My methodology chapter is robust and clearly articulated, therefore rendering my methodology visible. However, I recognise that another researcher might come to a different set of conclusions to mine, but this is the nature of constructivist research and should not be viewed as a limitation of the overall design of this research.

2.2 Implications of the literature review for methodology

As outlined in the 'Bridging Paper' this study utilises original data but has interpreted it within the context of both the established literature about EBP and the emerging and critical literatures about the nature of professional learning, knowledge transfer and the relationship between traditional forms of knowledge and practice. While recognising that knowledge transfer has become an established approach to dissemination within a range of professional and academic disciplines, I maintain that it is still a relatively under-researched phenomenon within social work academic and practice discourses. The nature of the literature that has been explored within this thesis has therefore afforded me the opportunity to reconsider and adapt my original interest in EBP to incorporate a wider perspective that took more fully into account the personal, professional, social and material factors that can become barriers to knowledge transfer in social work child protection research and practice.

2.3 The research questions

Sarantakos (2005) states that it is vital for the researcher to identify and describe the topics that they are researching. Research questions fall into two distinct categories: the main question and associated sub questions (Creswell, 2009). The central question is intended to broadly outline the focus of the research with the sub-questions providing a set of suppositions that can introduce an additional perspective and level of analysis to the key question. I was mindful that researchers can, unintentionally, construct their research questions in such a way as to merely confirm their own assumptions. It was, therefore, important for me to clearly outline the suppositions upon which my

research question was founded. The suppositions that I have developed below not only outline my theoretical position, but also bring additional perspectives from which to consider and analyse the research question. Having reviewed the literature and reflected upon my own experience and ontological position, a key research question emerged from which I developed three additional suppositions. The central research question and subsequent suppositions identified for this study are outlined below:

The central question is:

What are the barriers to effective knowledge exchange in child protection social work and what can be done to mitigate against them?

This study goes on to consider the following suppositions:

Do child protection social workers understand the nature and usefulness of evidence and knowledge and how it impacts on their practice?

And:

The organisational, political, cultural and social context in which child protection social work practice takes place is critical to better understanding how the barriers to effective knowledge exchange can be overcome.

And:

A new model of knowledge exchange is required to better understand the process of how knowledge is generated and shared in social work. Such a model would better inform the basis of policy, education and practice in child protection social work in the future.

2.4 An overview of the approach to methodology chosen for this research

My epistemological position has been informed by critiques of the traditional paradigms. Shaw (2000) observes that positivist and scientific research paradigms seek to construct and represent research as something that is isolated, neutral and abstract, where the primary role of the researcher is to identify a suitable research question and the most rigorous methodology to answer that question. This has not been my relationship to my research. My engagement with the research process stems from my experience as an academic and as a social work practitioner, and therefore cannot claim to be objective, disconnected or neutral in the pursuit of my research aims. This research is therefore mediated and influenced by my identity and from my personal epistemological beliefs about the nature of the world and the nature of knowledge. I am also aware that some of my influences may never be rendered explicit, yet they are there and have informed my approach and response to the research questions and subsequent emerging data. My approach to this research was also informed by my desire to contribute to social work practice and ultimately to make a difference to the lives of the children and young people and families who are involved in the child protection system. Within traditional definitions of research, this research therefore fits comfortably within the qualitative paradigm.

2.4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research has been described as a form of social research that has as its central focus the way in which people 'make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live' (Liamputtong, 2013:11). The qualitative research paradigm is one that acknowledges that human experience and understanding may change over time and may be influenced by social context. Consequently, a flexible approach is required in order to fully appreciate this changing context (Creswell, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Punch 2013). Liamputtong (2013) suggests that qualitative approaches are particularly helpful where there are gaps in the knowledge about a particular phenomenon because it is committed to understanding the human experience and its common

concern or characteristic is a ‘commitment to theoretically and conceptually formulating an engagement with the world that produces vivid descriptive accounts of human experience’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013:524). In my review of the literature for this study, it was evident that there were clear gaps in our knowledge about the nature of professional learning and knowledge transfer in child protection social work, which lends itself well to qualitative scrutiny in order to produce new meaning and understanding.

2.4.2 Constructivism

Qualitative research is sometimes referred to as empathic research, drawing as it does on a Vygotskian perspective that views research as a way of discovering meaning and understanding through the researcher actively engaging in the construction of this meaning (Kim, 2014). While the construction of meaning can be viewed as fitting broadly within a qualitative paradigm, Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) call for it to be known in its own right as the ‘third paradigm’ that demands that the researcher renders explicit their epistemological position. While claiming my approach to be constructivist, it is important to recognise the significance of this in detail. Guba and Lincoln are recognised as primary exponents of the term and outlined it in their 1994 work ‘Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), which they further refined in their 2013 text ‘The Constructivist Credo’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2013), in which they outline the philosophical considerations as follows:

‘Throughout history philosophers concerned with the nature of knowledge and inquiry have posed four fundamental questions:

1. ‘What is there that can be known?’ Or, to rephrase the question, ‘what is the nature of reality?’
2. ‘What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the knowable?’
3. The methodological question: ‘How does one go about acquiring knowledge?’

4. 'Of all the knowledge available to me, which is the most valuable, which is the most truthful, which is the most beautiful, which is the most life-enhancing?' (Adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 2013:37)

In considering my position as a constructivist researcher, it is important to fully appreciate the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions posed above and, in coming to a conclusion, to go on to consider the axiological question about the value and truth of the approach adopted. It is not enough to merely state that one has adopted a constructivist approach without fully acknowledging the subjective nature of the answers to the questions posed by Lincoln and Guba, and to render transparent any bias and also recognise that not everyone will see the research in the same way as the researcher. Considering the above, it remains clear that a social constructivist approach is appropriate, and my response to the questions posed will become apparent throughout this chapter.

2.4.3 Methodological considerations

Methods are not isolated entities but are either explicitly or implicitly related to theoretical assumptions and structures. However, all too often methods are applied without due consideration of their theoretical roots. As a researcher, I have attempted to explicitly consider both my theoretical and epistemological assumptions in the context of the method or approach that I have adopted. Brannen (2005) advocates that the case for separate paradigms, such as quantitative and qualitative paradigms, is due to the different research cultures, ontological positions and epistemological backgrounds of researchers. However, she goes on to argue that currently there is considerable pressure for greater cohesion between these positions, advocating that ultimately all social research is concerned with understanding the views and actions of people. Purists will posit that quantitative and qualitative methods stem from different epistemological and ontological positions and cannot and should not be mixed. Pragmatists, on the other hand, believe this to be a false dichotomy and advocate that both methodological approaches can and should be used in the one study if the research questions lend themselves to different approaches (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). Onwuegbuzie and Leech(2005) go on to

refer to this form of methodological pluralism as ‘pragmatic research’, and suggest that it would be more helpful to categorise research as either ‘exploratory’ or ‘confirmative’, rather than as quantitative or qualitative. Within this framework quantitative data analysis can be labelled as exploratory, i.e. descriptive statistics, while confirmatory methods can include quantitative inferential statistics. Qualitative data analysis methods can be exploratory, as in thematic analysis, or confirmatory in relation to testing extant theory or to replicate previous qualitative studies. Onwuegbuzie and Leech believe that pragmatic research offers advantages for both the researcher and the research, as they are able to better combine ‘empirical precision with descriptive precision’ (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005: 383). The result is therefore a more holistic approach to social research and more rounded researchers who can offer new and more flexible insights into the phenomena they study.

2.4.4 Methodology and theory

Lincoln and Guba refer to the theory that underpins research methods as ‘lenses through which we filter research findings’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2013:10). These theories may include feminism, racial and ethnic theories, along with a variety of critical theories. It is important to make our theoretical position explicit, as it underpins our epistemological position. The literature review contained in Chapter 1 of this study clearly outlines my theoretical position. I have adopted a critical approach to professional learning, and have instead conceptualised professional learning as something that is social and 'thoroughly practical and involv[ing] not simply the human mind but the living human being in continuous interaction with its environment' (James and Biesta, 2007:30). In keeping with ANT, I believe that in order to properly understand the social world the researcher must employ theory in a heterogeneous way. My conceptual framework for considering professional learning therefore draws on a plurality of theories, including socio-materialism and actor-network theory, both of which locate the actor and their learning in the context of the social and political.

As indicated in Chapter 1, complexity theory has offered another lens through which to view the process of social and professional learning, (Hood, 2014). Bennett (2009) represents complexity as the non-linear relationship between people and context, and places value on the nature of our associations. Of particular interest is the notion of 'emergence' where complex systems of humans, relationships and non-humans emerge together to form new inter-connected systems. I believe that my theoretical assumptions about the social world and the world of work are consistent with the methodologically constructivist approach that I have adopted for my research. In Chapter 1 of this study, I examined the literature relating to evidence-based practice, professional learning and knowledge transfer, and came to the conclusion that while this literature provided an interesting critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, it failed to provide an alternative paradigm from which to consider how the social work profession could better generate new knowledge and ensure that existing knowledge is adequately transferred to all those who need it, to ensure better outcomes for service users. While some studies did identify the barriers to the effective uptake of traditional forms of evidence, none applied the findings in the context of the wider socio-material world of the professional (Mullen and Bacon, 2004; Bellamy *et al*, 2008; Mullen and Bellamy 2008). In essence, the social, political and cultural context of social work child protection practice is largely absent from the professional learning literature. I have therefore adopted a pragmatic and interpretivist paradigm, recognising that reality is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings that we develop through social engagement. This subjective epistemology requires that I make explicit my own ontological position in relation to how I understand the social and professional world of work and how this is negotiated through social dialogue and shared experiences (Angen, 2000). As someone who still regards myself first and foremost a child protection practitioner, I am forced into a dialectical process with myself as a feminist researcher. This tension has been explored by Stanley (1990), who states that within feminist research the 'divisions between students and teachers, the researched and researchers, and practice are seen as neither simple nor absolute' (Stanley, 1990:11). Moreover, Stanley recognises that researchers and academics do not have a 'monopoly over understanding, analysis, theorising, consciousness, political commitment' (Stanley, 1990:12).

Feminist research demands that in order to be useful, knowledge and theory must be committed to recognising praxis as a way of understanding the world, and that research should be located within the material, social and political context in which practice takes place.

The result of this internal ideological and epistemological tension has undoubtedly led to a more sophisticated understanding of the data and the world of professional practice and the nature of academic knowledge. My openness to praxis as a form of knowledge, and my commitment to using this in my interpretation of the data, has been central to my approach to this study. May (2011) tells us that qualitative research requires an acknowledgement of bias and the need for researchers to ensure that the data is not influenced by their own personal and professional experiences. However, my own stance as a researcher/practitioner is that this cannot and should not be avoided; rather it should be merely rendered visible. Christensen and Prout (2002) reflect on their research with children, and remind us that research is about social relationships that exist within cultural contexts and are informed by hierarchical power relationships. I believe that these issues also apply to research with adults, where the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the subjects of the research need to be considered. The social and cultural landscape in which this study took place is as ‘uncertain, variable, context bound and complex’ as suggested by Christiansen and Prout (2002:493). Researchers working with adults also need to engage with ethical questions, and need to be able to reflect on the process in which they play a central role.

Different definitions of reflexiv exist (White, Fook and Gardner, 2006). Jindal-Snape and Hannah (2014) define reflexivity as the ability to understand where you are coming from, and how your perspective is influenced by your personal values and beliefs. Fook and Gardner's (2007) definition also recognises that the social and historical contexts of our lives are not always apparent and that we might not always recognise the ways in which our own perspectives and actions can impact upon and reinforce inequalities in society. It is only through the process of critical reflection that we can begin to understand what lies beneath our thoughts and actions, and by further consideration of the social

structures at play, we begin to move towards a position of reflexivity. Research is the process of creating knowledge and Fook and Gardner (2007) suggest that we create knowledge every day, albeit in unarticulated ways, and consider therefore that research is integral to the daily business of living and professional practice. With this in mind, Fook and Gardner (2007) remind us that knowledge does not exist in an independent form and cannot be separated from our own experiences or our sense of who we are. Bearing this in mind, the authors go on to outline four ways in which we can contribute to knowledge creation:

1. Knowledge is both embodied and social (as well as emotionally and intellectually influenced)
2. Knowledge is subjectively mediated
3. There is a reactivity element (the tools used to discover knowledge and influence what is found)
4. Knowledge is created interactively (influenced by the specific situation) (Fook and Gardner, 2007:28)

Knowledge is social in nature and is therefore mediated by the subjectivity of those creating and using it. Within this study I have recognised my own subjective position as a social work practitioner and academic, and have an implicit understanding of my own personal, social and cultural identity. This awareness through critical reflection has enabled me to recognise that, while I have attempted to approach this study and the data in an objective way, it is likely that my findings have been subjectively created or modified (Fook and Gardner, 2007). No doubt my understanding of myself, and my subjective position within my research, will continue to develop over time and in the context of new personal experiences and social and professional dialogues.

2.4.5 Validity and reliability

Guba (1989) and Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that, in relation to constructivist approaches, the terms validity and reliability should be replaced by authenticity and used only to guide research, rather than proscribe how it should be conducted. However, measures can be taken to ensure a degree of

reliability that might be appropriate in some forms of qualitative research. By adopting the position, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:133) suggest that, within the traditions of qualitative research, validity can be addressed through the 'honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved', I believe that this research conforms to these requirements. My own position as a researcher/practitioner is also wholly compatible with this approach; particularly as I have ensured that I am transparent about any potential bias by adopting a rigorous reflexive position throughout the study. I have also considered Maxwell's five kinds of validity in qualitative research, and consider that this research meets his requirements in relation to 'descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity (Maxwell, 1992:284-285). The data that I relied upon was factual, and has been analysed with a view to trying to interpret meaning as intended by the students. The theoretical constructs are appropriate for the study, and the analysis can be generalised to other similar situations, for example other areas of social work professional learning. My own position as a practitioner/researcher with many years' experience also renders the study reliable, authentic and credible.

While I have endeavoured to ensure a high level of trustworthiness and authenticity in this research, it would be fair for questions to be raised in relation to my role as programme director, which could be taken to infer status or authority. However, I am mindful of this and believe that the students were fully informed of the research, and gave their consent without prejudice. It is also important to recognise that undertaking research into my own area of practice as an academic demonstrates openness to new knowledge and understanding and a degree of reflexivity in relation to my own professional development that has, in my view, contributed significantly to my teaching and supervision of students' work.

2.4.6 The research design and method of analysis

This study drew upon the academic assignments from two cohorts of students from 2009 and 2013 who were completing a postgraduate certificate in childcare and protection. In total 36 assignments were analysed using a form of

secondary data analysis. These assignments were substantial pieces of summatively assessed work, and amounted to approximately 216,000 words of text that comprised the data available for this study.

In order to properly understand the nature of data and the contexts in which the assignments were written, I chose to do the analysis of the data manually rather than using electronic software.

2.5. The data

The students who gave consent for their assignments to be used in this research came from a range of professional backgrounds and all had at least two years' experience working in the substantive field of child protection. This research, however, comprised of only those from the class who were qualified social workers. Two cohorts were compared for this study. The first sample included all assignments that were submitted for assessment during the academic session 2009/10. The second sample was from students doing the same module during the academic session 2013/14. These samples represent a comparative perspective spanning four years. The samples consider how evidence-based practice is conceptualised by social work practitioners working within a child protection context. The nature of these findings provides an in-depth and multifaceted understanding of the views and understandings of how evidence-based practice is conceptualised and utilised in contemporary child protection practice, and how this has changed over time.

2.6 Methods of data collection

The data for this study was contained within the academic assignments that had been written by postgraduate students. Rather than undertaking qualitative interviews with students, I recognised that these assignments already contained sufficiently detailed and contextualised data, and I therefore decided to draw upon this by means of secondary documentary analysis. Further information about these assignments can be found later in this chapter. This decision was also pragmatic, as it allowed me to access 36 assignments when it would have

been very difficult to directly interview or survey 36 social workers. Using module assignments also meant that the students had engaged with advanced level study in relation to the topic under investigation. This method also enabled me to make the claim that those students who had elected to do this module had some degree of professional interest in the topic, and therefore their perspectives could not be dismissed as uninformed.

From the 2009 cohort of students, 30 essays were sampled and a further 6 were sampled from the 2013 cohort. The assignments selected had been written by qualified social work child protection professionals. The decision to focus only on the assignments written by those students who were qualified social workers related to my own professional area of expertise, but it also allowed me to further develop some of the themes that had emerged from the paper 'Fit for Purpose' (Kelly and Jackson, 2011) and from my teaching experience. However, this meant that the data was not as rich as it could have been. While this limitation was considered before commencing the research, the low numbers of students undertaking the module who were not from a social work background ultimately informed the decision. In the first cohort, only six other students were from a non-social work background and these came from a variety of backgrounds such as policing, health and education. In the second cohort, there were only three students from other backgrounds and these again represented a diverse group. To have included these students would have necessitated considering the professional learning literature from a much wider perspective, which would have been disproportionate to the small numbers involved. As the numbers were so small, I decided that no reliable inferences could have been made from the sample and therefore confirmed my decision to focus only on the texts from those students who were social work qualified.

The students were required to submit one summative assignment for assessment as part of the module, and each assignment was approximately 6000 words in length. These assignments provided the empirical data for this research. As previously stated, the amount of data was large, (216,000 words) and I decided that, in order to properly understand the nature of the data and the contexts in which the students were working, I should do the analysis

manually. I read each assignment several times and over an extended period of time to ensure that I fully understood the narratives. I found that with each reading I developed a more sophisticated understanding of the data, and this iterative approach to the data ensured a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the student's voice.

Throughout the period of data analysis I adopted an iterative and flexible approach to the data, which meant that sometimes I had to go back and revisit the primary data again. Through this process it became clear to me that I was able to refine my research questions and sub-questions to make better use of the data. This reflective approach is consistent with my non-traditional approach to the relationship between the literature review and research questions, as highlighted earlier in this section. Because I had personally analysed each assignment thoroughly, I was also able to distil important qualitative statements that illustrated the analytical points that I had highlighted. I was able to pay attention to the narrative that underpinned each statement, and to consider this within the overall context of the assignment. This was important in relation to better understanding how people make meaning of their lives by drawing on their relationships and networks (Gadamer, 2004). During this process, I was struck by the narrative content of many of the assignments. The students had been required to engage with the concept and literature relating to EBP in relation to their social work practice, and were required to reflect upon this engagement process. Not only did this assignment require students to critique the literature, but to give an in-depth account of how they felt the concept of EBP might be, usefully or otherwise, deployed in their own practice setting. Students posed concerns about the role of their employers, including an apparent lack of support in terms of their ongoing professional development learning needs. What struck me was the similarity in the nature of the concerns expressed and the genuine commitment expressed by the students in relation to their own professional learning.

The assignments selected for analysis were produced over two distinct periods of time. The first cohort submitted their assignments in 2009 and the second cohort in 2013. This four-year gap was in part due to the fact that the module

had not been delivered between 2009 and 2013, as insufficient numbers of students had selected it as part of their postgraduate certificate. This is in itself of interest. The EBP module was introduced as a direct response to employer demand for their staff to become more 'evidence-based' in their practice. The module was very popular for the first three years of its introduction in 2007. However, by 2010 students were instead selecting a module entitled 'Inter-professional collaboration'. This change suggested that EBP was becoming less of a topic of interest to both employers and students, which may be indicative of the shift towards a greater integration of social work and related social services.

2.7 Method of analysis

For the analysis of my data, I have elected to use aspects of both content analysis (CA) and thematic analysis (TA). This approach sits comfortably within both essentialist and realist methods, which seek to understand the experiences and the reality of students. It can also be adopted as part of a constructionist approach, which seeks to examine the ways in which the events, realities, and experiences of people impact on their discourse. TA permits both essentialist and constructivist approaches, which reveal both the meaning and experiences of individuals while also retaining a focus on the wider material and social contexts that impact on these realities. Braun and Clarke (2006) do, however, acknowledge that while the method may be flexible, it is important that the researcher is transparent about their own theoretical position, as this will allow the reader to make certain assumptions about how the data has been interpreted. For my study, I was particularly drawn to the idea that TA allows the researcher to make meaning of practitioner experiences within the broader social context in which the practice takes place, allowing me as the researcher to consider the data reflectively as well as analytically. Provided my own theoretical views have been made clear, this approach offers the most pragmatic and transparent approach for my study.

Holloway and Todres (2003) have suggested that the ability to identify themes is central to qualitative research, and view this as something that is common to most qualitative studies. Thematic analysis has been described by Braun and Clarke as 'a method for identifying, analysis and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail' (2006:79). The authors claim that, although TA is not always recognised as a method in its own right, most qualitative analysis is essentially thematic in nature. There does, however, appear to be a lack of consensus about how TA should be applied (Tuckett, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide one of the few guides to TA and explain that it is essentially independent of theory and epistemology, rendering it useful for a wide range of approaches and paradigms. This theoretical freedom makes TA a flexible and useful research tool that can provide a rich and detailed account of data.

Drawing briefly on content analysis (CA), I have also used simple descriptive statistics to report some of the themes. However, within the tradition of TA and qualitative research, the number of times that a theme emerges does not necessarily mean that this theme is more important than another. Therefore the TA approach does not require the researcher to detail the statistical frequencies of the themes they identify, permitting instead terms such as 'the majority of participants' (Meehan, Vermeer and Windsor, 2000: 372), 'many participants' (Taylor and Ussher, 2001: 298), or 'a number of participants' (Braun, Gavey and McPhillips, 2003: 249).

I do, however, recognise that such conventions may be viewed as lacking in clarity and specificity. Therefore, in order to ensure that my data is sufficiently robust, I have chosen to adopt an approach to TA that focuses on a group of themes that relate specifically to my research questions, and does not attempt to provide a review of the whole dataset. My approach to TA is one in which my own theoretical perspective is transparent. This approach is again consistent with my decision to focus on only those parts of the data that relate to my research questions. By making explicit my decision to adopt a theoretical as opposed to a more inductive approach, I have made it clear to the reader that

my coding has been done specifically to better understand my research questions. While this approach will provide a less detailed description of the overall data, it will provide a rich account of the aspects of the data that I am most interested in.

I am also mindful of the limitations of TA and have been careful to keep these in mind while analysing my data. Again, the work of Braun and Clarke (2008) was useful in this respect. The first consideration should be to ensure that the researcher provides a true analysis of the themes and does not merely present a string of quotes followed by a descriptive account of what was said. My analysis therefore attempts to demonstrate how the extracts selected support my theory and identify the meanings behind the quotations. I was also careful to ensure that the themes that I have identified were not merely a reiteration of my research questions and suppositions, as this would fail to recognise patterns and meanings that occurred within the data itself. I was also mindful to consider the coherence of my themes and to ensure that they did not overlap too closely with each other and were in fact consistent in their own sense and not just anecdotal accounts that, while interesting, do not necessarily constitute a theme. Finally, I have also tried to ensure that the themes are truly reflective of the data and not just my interpretation. As a qualitative researcher, I recognise that my interpretation might be open to challenge. To mitigate against any potential bias, I have therefore carefully considered the intended meaning behind the themes, but have also acknowledged possible alternatives where appropriate. To further ensure that my themes and analysis are consistent, I have also considered how they fit within my theoretical perspective and have made this explicit in my conclusions. By considering these pitfalls, I believe that my decision to use TA has produced themes and analyses that are robust and consistent with the data and meanings and experiences of the students.

My approach to analysing the data was informed by the framework outlined by Vaismoradi *et al*, 2013 (see Table 2), as it provided a coherent and structured approach to the analytical process, and assisted in ensuring I was mindful of moving between TA and CA approaches.

Table 2 Process of data analysis in thematic and content analysis

Analysis phases and their descriptions	
Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87)	**Content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008: 110)**
Familiarising with data Transcribing data, reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.	*Preparation* Being immersed in the data and obtaining the sense of whole, selecting the unit of analysis, deciding on the analysis of manifest content or latent content.
Generating initial codes Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	*Organising* Open coding and creating categories, grouping codes under higher order headings, formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories and subcategories as abstracting.
Searching for themes Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.	
Reviewing themes Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map.	
Defining and naming themes Ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	
Producing the report The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis.	*Reporting* Reporting the analysing process and the results through models, conceptual systems, conceptual map or categories, and a story line.

Source: (Vaismoradi *et al.* 2013:402, reprinted with permission, appendix 8)

As previously stated, thematic analysis recognises that the importance of a theme is not necessarily correlated with the frequency in which it appears in the text, but rather that the importance of a theme should relate to its significance in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this research, importance of a theme was connected specifically to its relationship to the literature, the rest of the data and my own experience.

2.7.1 Abstraction process

To ensure transparency in my method of abstracting the categories from the assignments, I used an inductive content analysis process outlined by Elo and Kyngäs, (2008). Abstraction is the process whereby the researcher formulates a general description of the research topic by generating categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). The researcher is required to extract general categories from the data and name these by using the words contained within the category. Subcategories should then be identified that group together similar themes or incidents, and these can then be further grouped into final main categories. Table 3 below outlines an example of how one main category was abstracted from the subcategories that emerged from the data.

Table 3 Examples of extraction process

Subcategory	Generic Category	Main category
• Lack of staff • Need to use my own time	Insufficient resources	
• Can't allocate work • Work is unpredictable • Caseloads too complex		Lack of time
• Lack of thinking time	Work unplanned	

2.7.2 Data analysis

This research adopted a qualitative thematic analytical method as outlined above. This method of analysis was selected, as it is compatible with the depth and complexity of information contained within each assignment and the aims of the research. I found the categories in Holsti's (1968) useful for considering the basis for my analysis and adapted them as follows:

- Subject, theme: what is it about?
- Values: what attitudes, goals and wishes are displayed?
- Authority: under what name are statements made?
- Place: where do the actions take place?
- Conflicts: what is the cause of any conflict? Who are the students? How strong is the conflict?
- Outcome: is the end of the conflict happy, tragic or uncertain?
- Time: when does the action take place?

From the review of the literature and a thematic analysis of the essays, more than thirty key themes arose, but these were then more closely distilled and refined and reduced to six barriers that were then contextualised in relation to the narratives contained within the assignments. Six independent themes were distilled, which relate to the ineffectual nature of EBP as a framework for knowledge acquisition and transfer across social work child protection professionals. The six themes are: a lack of time to read the evidence; a lack of a supportive organisational culture; a lack of relevant academic literature that speaks directly to the Scottish practice context; a lack of critical appraisal skills as experienced by the students; a lack of IT skills as experienced by the students; limited access to IT equipment and literature. These themes suggest that there is considerable disjuncture between the rhetoric of social work professional bodies that profess that EBP enhances social work practice and the reality for those who do the job. These themes are further explored in the next chapter.

2.8 The Programme: The Postgraduate Certificate in Child Care and Protection at the University of Dundee

The following description of the above programme provides the academic context in which the assignments that were used as the data set for this research were written. The programme was a postgraduate certificate and was awarded at Level 11 of the Scottish Qualifications Framework (master's level), (SCQF 2012). Students were required to have a first degree or equivalent for access to the programme. The programme offered opportunities for collaborative learning within multi-professional groups. The mode of delivery consisted of a mixture of face to face and distance learning components, which were designed to meet the needs of professionals, balancing occupational commitments and learning. The distance learning components were delivered through the use of modern web-based learning technologies (the University's virtual learning environment), and all course students received training on how to access and utilise these technologies. The programme was delivered on a part-time basis and students were able to study for either a postgraduate certificate, diploma or masters level award. The course was withdrawn in September 2014.

2.8.1 Module content

The module covered aspects of the conceptual roots of evidence-based practice, underlying principles and models of evidence-based practice and a critical understanding and appreciation of different forms of evidence, including research evidence.

This included the following dimensions:

- An understanding of the policy context driving evidence-based practice
- A critical understanding of the principles and concepts which underpin evidence-based practice and its roots within medicine, and its transferability to other professional disciplines
- A critical understanding of different forms of evidence including: practitioner expertise, practitioner judgment, professional observation

and data on clients, local and national information (e.g. audit and evaluation evidence), policy and guidance, research, client circumstances and wishes, local contextual knowledge

- Skills in appraising the quality and validity of different forms of evidence
- Demonstrating understanding of the process of locating, appraising and synthesising research evidence and its application to practice issues

2.8.2 Assessment

The module required students to complete two assessments, one of which was summative in nature. *(This section has been extracted from the programme handbook 2009 -2013):*

Formative Assessment (not graded).

Group Task Leading to a Presentation

Students will work in a group to source and appraise research evidence related to a particular practice issue or a topic relevant to childcare and protection. Each group will present an overview of their key findings on the last day of teaching. The presentation should be no longer than 30 minutes and will be followed by a 15-minute question and answer session.

Participation in the group task is compulsory.

Summative Assessment (graded)

6,000 Word Essay

Each student will be required to produce one 6,000 word assignment to include:

(a) A 3,000 word critical reflection on the process of sourcing and appraising research evidence. This can draw on your experience of the group task.
(b) A 3,000 word critical analysis of the concept of evidence-based practice.

This assignment required students to define and critically explore the concept of EBP and consider its validity as a concept within their professional work. The emphasis of this assignment was for students to reflect critically on the barriers to the implementation of EBP as a framework for enhancing their own practice and the work of their service.

2.9 Ethical approval

I applied for and received ethical approval from the University of Dundee Ethics Committee (UREC). As I researched student assignments from two distinct cohorts of students from 2009 and 2013, I applied for and received ethical approval for both cohorts (Appendix 1, 2009 and Appendix 2,2013 of Part 1 of this thesis). It is important to note that the original title of the research was: 'Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning: a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions'. However, after consideration I changed the focus to: 'Student perceptions and experiences implementing evidence-based practice into their practice as social workers: a documentary analysis of essays'. This change in title was discussed with my supervisors and it was agreed that it did not necessitate further ethical approval, as the students had given consent for me to conduct an analysis of their assignments and it was agreed that the consent still applied, as the student assignments required them to address both questions. This change in emphasis emerged after my initial analysis of the data and also recognised my shifting interest from primarily a teaching and scholarship perspective to one that addressed child protection professional learning more broadly.

As a registered social worker, I was also mindful of the need to adhere to the Code of Practice as outlined by the SSSC (2009). All those who participated in the research were informed about the study and their informed consent was sought in writing. Permission to use the assignments was sought from students in the 2009 cohort after they had completed the module. As I wanted to compare the data from the 2009 cohort with a more current cohort, I approached the students on the 2013 cohort at the start of the module. Although I was the Programme Director at the time of the 2013 cohort, I was not

the module leader and only moderated the final grades. The participant information leaflet that was given to students made it clear that their decision to participate or not to participate would have no impact on their grade or have any influence whatsoever on the marking system.

My role as researcher and teacher had the potential to be a source of conflict, as it might have had some impact on the nature of the data presented by the students who were being formally assessed by me. However, time was taken at the introductory stages to reassure students that their agreement or otherwise to participate would not impact on their final grade. Indeed, all grades were moderated by another internal member of staff and, ultimately, by the External Examiner for the programme. Additionally, students were advised that their responses would be kept confidential and all information would be anonymised. All students were given the opportunity to discuss the nature of the research with me directly and to raise any issues. As all students were qualified social workers, it was assumed that they would have the capacity to refuse consent if they had any concerns. Colleagues who provided an input into this module were also supportive of this research, as they believed that it would further enhance our academic understanding of the key concepts that were being taught and examined.

2.10 Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to explain in detail what I did and why I did it. This was informed by the literature, my understanding of the theory, my methodology and, finally, to the approach I have taken to data analysis. I have outlined what I consider to be the limits of the approach, but have hopefully been able to argue that the research is worthwhile and has been executed in a robust and transparent way. The next chapter will focus on my analysis and interpretation of the data and the results.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the significant findings that have emerged from this research. This research was based on an adapted thematic analysis of 36 written assignments that were submitted by social work child protection practitioners for assessment for the postgraduate module entitled ‘Critical thinking and evidence-based practice’. Six of the assignments were submitted four years after the first cohort, and any variations in the findings are discussed.

Previous chapters have discussed the theoretical framework that underpins the research. This chapter will revisit the research questions and suppositions and consider the method of analysis that was adopted for the study. A description of the students has also been provided. The chapter will then go on to outline the core themes that I have identified from the data, and will conclude by drawing together the key themes in relation to the research questions and suppositions and the literature. This concluding section will also provide an introduction to the final chapter of the thesis.

3.2 Demographics of the students

This section provides an overview of the students whose assignments formed the data for this research. All data was gathered from the assignments or application forms. Appendix 3 (Part 1) provides the key for the code that has been used to describe the students. Table 4 below provides a snapshot of the key used.

Table 4: Example key to students

Student number	Cohort 1 (2009) 2 (2013)	Gender	Age range 1 (25-35yrs) 2 (36-45yrs) 3 (46yrs +)	Number of years qualified(exp) 1 (2-10yrs) 2 (11-20yrs) 3 (20yrs+)	Role Social worker (SW) Senior social worker (SSW) Manager (M) Staff development (SD)
1	1	F	1	1	SW
2	1	F	1	1	SW
3	1	M	1	1	SW
4	1	F	1	1	SW

In total 36 post graduate assignments were reviewed.

3.2.1 Gender

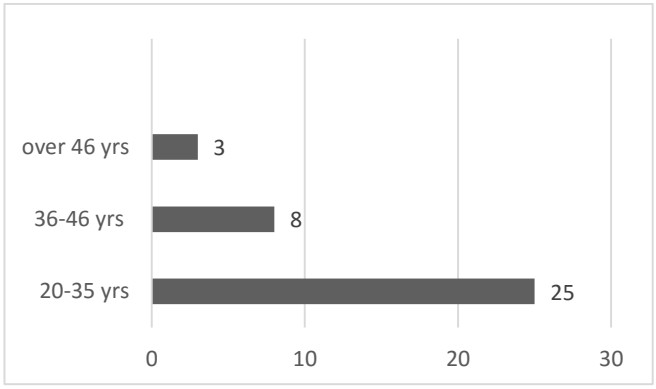
There were 25 women (69.5%) doing the module and 11 men (30.5%).

The information about the gender of students broadly reflects Scottish Government statistics. The latest figures from the Scottish Government for 2011 show that 84.2% of the social workers in Scotland are female (Scottish Government 2011). This suggests that men are over-represented in this study. The apparent over-representation of men in these cohorts might indicate that men view the acquisition of postgraduate qualifications as a route to promotion, thereby indicating that they are more ambitious than women social workers.

3.2.2 Age

Figure 5 below represents the age groups in which the students fell.

Figure 5: Age of students



Most recent statistics from the SSSC in 2013 show the average age of social workers in Scotland to be 45 years (SSSC, 2013:22). This reveals an interesting contrast to the age of the students in this research, where the majority were in the age group 20-35 years.

3.2.3 Gender by age

There were 4 men in the age group 25-35 years and 4 in the age group 36-45 years. The remaining 3 men were over 46 years.

The women were all under 46 years, with 19 being between ages 25-35 years and 6 being between 36 years and 45 years. The women in this group were younger than the average age for the workforce.

3.2.4 Age by length of time qualified

Approximately 42% of students had been qualified for 10 years or less when undertaking the module. It is not surprising to see that those in the older age groups had been qualified for the longest period of time. There are no national statistics regarding the length of time social workers have been qualified in the national workforce.

3.2.5 Limits of this data

There was no way of knowing the ethnic background, disability status or work pattern of the students. The limitation of this data will be considered further in the final chapter.

3.2.5 Role

Of the 36 students, 11 were in promoted roles (senior social worker, manager or staff development). It is interesting to note that 4 men (36% of men) were in promoted posts, while only 5 women (20% of women) occupied these roles. Those students who had been promoted fell into the 11 years and over category for length of time qualified. The majority of students were, however, main grade workers (social worker role). During my seven years as programme director of the Post Graduate Certificate in Child Care and Protection, I have noticed (anecdotally) that fewer people in promoted roles were coming forward for the programme. This may be due to the fact that many of them had already completed post-qualifying child protection education, or it may be due to lack of time owing to the greater responsibility of their more senior roles. It is also of interest to note that in Scotland there is no nationally agreed framework for post-qualifying social work training and education. The ‘Continuous Learning Framework’ (SSSC and IRISS, 2008) merely refers to national occupational standards for specific qualifications, and is silent on the requirement for those in specialist posts to have any specific qualification (Kelly and Jackson, 2011:484).

3.3 The core themes

Table 5 outlines the core themes identified from the data and places them in order of occurrence.

Table 5 Core themes

Barrier	Number of Students 2009 Cohort	Number of Students 2013 Cohort	Order
Lack of time	24	10	1
Organisational culture	24	9	2
Lack of relevant literature	22	7	3
Lack of critical research appraisal skills	22	6	4
Lack of IT skills	14	7	5
Lack of access to IT or literature	4	7	6

As well as conducting an analysis of the content, I have also utilised the basic thematic analysis approach of Smith (2009) to provide a deeper level of analysis of the categories obtained by the abstraction process. Smith (2009) suggests that thematic analysis should be considered in three stages: interrogation of the data, grouping emerging themes and providing an explanation for what has emerged. The narratives contained within the assignments were read with a view to providing evidence for underlying influences upon the findings, as this is in keeping with the 'interpretivist' approach adopted for this research (May 2011). Due to the amount of detail contained in some of the narratives, many of them encapsulated more than one theme within them and in these cases each theme was counted separately.

Table 6 provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from the data with examples that have been taken directly from the assignments. It is interesting to note that the themes that emerged were the same for both cohorts. While every attempt has been made to consider the meaning of themes as intended by the students, it is important to note that the purpose of a thematic analysis is to find the 'best fit, rather than absolute certainty.' (Smith, 2009:169).

Table 6 Key themes emerging from the data

	Example Quotations
Lack of time	'It is difficult to devote the time to analyse the evidence for specific client issues particularly when work load priorities can change on a daily basis if and when crises arise.' (Student:7,Cohort:1,F, Age:25-35,Exp:2-10yrs, Role: SW , Role,1,SSW)
Organisational culture	'In my own experience the development of evidence-based social work in my own agency is at a very early stage, and I do not see much motivation within the agency to develop evidence-based practice.' (Student:11, Cohort::1,M, Age:45yrs+, Exp:20yrs+, Role:, SW)
Lack of relevant literature	'I immediately discounted the articles which I felt to be based solely too much on the medical model of intervention. Others with some relevance were deemed to be academically complicated or unclear in their intentions, making them very difficult to read.' (Student:29,Cohort:1, F, Age 25-35yrs, Exp:11-20yrs, Role: ,SSW) 'Executing a literature research on 'inter-agency working in child protection services' presented information from a variety of sources (children and families, disabilities, mental health, nursing and health related fields) and failed to provide enough specific information from which to assess and draw conclusions.' (Student: 30, Cohort:1, F, Age:25-35, Exp:11-20yrs, Role:, SW)
Lack of critical research appraisal skills	'The language and terminology barrier was certainly something which I encountered, with a dictionary being frequently referred to whilst reading various articles.'(Student:23:1M,1,2,SW) 'Some research was difficult to understand, particularly as research is often not written in a way which is easily accessible.' (Student;15,Cohort:1,:F, Age: 25-35, Exp:2-10yrs, Role: SW)
Lack of IT skills	'Many students experienced feelings of ineptitude.' (Student:34,Cohort: 2, F, Age:36-45yrs, Exp:11-20yrs, Role: SW) 'Others were further ahead than me.' (Student:9, Cohort:1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp:2-10yrs, Role: SW)
Lack of access to IT or relevant literature	'Some of the barriers which I encountered were to do with technology, internet access being interrupted and downloading problems.' (Student: 23, Cohort:1, M, Age:25-35yrs Exp; 11-20yrs, Role: SW) 'If today's vehicle for dissemination of research is the internet in the workplace, the writer would propose that not having unrestricted access to the internet in the workplace […] would be a fairly reasonable prohibiting factor.' (Student: 25, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp:11-20yrs. Role: SW) 'Poor quality research available in the work place i.e. 'favourite' research relied upon even although not robust.'(Student: 35, Cohort:2, ,F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW)
Additional	This category covered those themes that emerged in lower numbers from the data but raised equally valid points for analysis. These themes were: *Ethical dilemmas, Lack of opportunities for practitioners to engage with research, lack of motivation of practitioners to engage with research and the contested nature of evidence*

The students' assignments revealed six key barriers to the implementation of evidence-based practice within the contemporary child protection context in Scotland. The assignments revealed that social workers who specialise in child protection are not adequately trained, skilled or resourced to be able to consider the evidence base for their practice in their practice settings. The narratives of the assignments revealed that the students understood and valued the opportunity to have more evidence upon which to base practice decisions, and they also recognised the complexity and contested nature of the concept of evidence. However, in the reality of their day-to day practice, almost all students experienced real barriers when trying to locate, access and assess the quality and relevance of the evidence that exists. An analysis of these barriers is provided below.

3.3.1 Core theme 1: Lack of time

This was the most common theme in the study. Interestingly, the length of time qualified appears to have had no impact on the frequency of the reporting of this theme, nor did the role of the student. It may have been assumed that the more experienced practitioners would have been better able to manage their time, and that this would have been indicated in the data. However, it appears that this issue relates more to the demands of the role rather than the practitioner's ability to manage their own time effectively. This interpretation is supported by the data, where the lack of time was usually cited in the context of workloads and increasing pressure from organisations in relation to financial cutbacks. There was a tacit acknowledgement from these students that being able to source and then access relevant literature and research was time consuming and that this was not acknowledged in their workload, where no additional consideration was made for professional development time. There seem to be competing demands on practitioners' time, including the push from recent inquiries (Munro, 2011) to spend more time with children and families, while at the same time attending to an increasing amount of bureaucracy and paperwork. There appears to be little or no recognition of time required to attend to ongoing learning and personal research. There was also a sense that most workers did not have sufficient autonomy over their workload to be able to determine how they spent their time. Interestingly, those in more senior roles

did not contradict these findings. It is, however, acknowledged that there was only one student in this study who was a manager, the rest were social workers or senior social workers, or equivalent and therefore not particularly senior within their organisation.

Webb questions whether 'it is realistic to assume that a more rigorous and standardised method of evidence-based practice can be implemented within existing cost cutting social work departments by practitioners who already struggle to keep abreast in overloaded information environments.' (Webb, 2001:74-75).

> *'I am aware of my own caseload and the impact of deviating from set tasks during the core hours of work. The effect of this often results in additional hours having to be worked, workers becoming more stressed as they cannot reach deadlines.'* (Student: 5, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Experience: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

Student 5 highlights the increasing levels of stress that colleagues are facing during the current economic climate and Student 7 further elaborates on the reality of the working day for social workers by bringing attention to the unpredictable nature of the work and the likelihood of crises occurring on a daily basis:

> *'… it is difficult to devote the time to analyse the evidence for specific client issues particularly when work load priorities can change on a daily basis if and when crises arise.'* (Student: 7, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35, Exp: 2-10 yrs. Role: SW).

This student raised an important point about the need for time to think. Considering your practice and weighing up the options available all requires time and space to reflect. There is clearly a need for protected time in which practitioners can not only consider the case management aspects of their work,

but also the equally important, theory, values, evidence and emotional aspects of their role.

> *'… at present it is invariably the case that social workers are working with caseloads that are too large and difficult to manage. They are also working in situations where it is difficult to retain staff, and where the amount of work is such that each client receives a relatively limited amount of time. In addition to this, the demands of our case recording and report writing as well as preparation for and attendance at the range of professional meetings, means that it is impossible to avoid the tendency towards increasing amounts of time being spent in activities other than direct client contact*.' (Student: 11, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 46yrs+, Exp: 20yrs +, Role: SW).

> *'… social work practitioners further impeded by inadequate time, as a result of increasing organisational and workload pressures, for example, legal processes, recording keeping*.' (Student: 32, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20 yrs., Role: SSW).

Byrne (1998) provides a definition of a complex system as being 'the domain between linearly determined order and indeterminate chaos'. Drawing on Steven and Cox's (2008:1326), metaphor about family life existing 'on the edge of chaos' it might be claimed that the professional life of social work child protection practitioners is similarly existing in such a precarious state. These comments give us a glimpse of professional life that appears to consist of complicated sets of relationships and interconnected networks. Student 7 recognises this interconnection and the tensions between the interconnected domains of practice, service user effectiveness and resources:

> *'… if workers applied the EBP framework with current case load numbers this framework would not be beneficial to client, worker or organisation.'* (Student: 7, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

There are, however, indications that there is support for a more informed or evidence-based approach to practice, but again the lack of time appears to interfere with the adoption of such practices:

> *'Our team leader is encouraging this (EBP) to be part of our work ethos and as a team to discuss and evaluate relevant pieces of research into part of the time allocated for team meetings. This proposal has been welcomed by the team but unfortunately not been exercised yet due to work load demands.'* (Student: 8, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

This comment bears out the point made previously about the lack of time for supervision and reflection.

Summary of theme

It is apparent that a lack of time to engage in the research is a fundamental barrier to the implementation of EBP in child protection social work. The lack of time also inhibits the social worker from having time to properly reflect on their practice and to consider or evaluate its effectiveness. Students understand the need to further develop their technical and cognitive skills in relation to understanding and applying research evidence, but the development of these skills and the acquisition of this knowledge require time and organisational support to ensure that this task becomes part of daily practice. It is recognised that the students were practising social work during a time of stringent financial cutbacks. However, the idea that social workers who are charged with protecting the most vulnerable members of our society do not have time to think about what they are doing, or to evaluate their practice through supervision and reflection, is surely a significant point of concern to the profession, the regulator and of course the public.

3.3.2 Core theme 2: Organisational culture

Students from both cohorts and across all ages and roles overwhelmingly reported (33 students that they did not feel that their organisation encouraged or supported them adequately in their endeavours to locate their practice in an evidence-informed context. The responses expressed concern that some managers and colleagues did not view research as a worthwhile activity. This may suggest a tendency towards 'anti-intellectualism' that has been highlighted in the literature, however, it should also be noted that managers were not interviewed as part of this study so no firm conclusions can be draw. Student 4 recognised that her participation in the postgraduate childcare and protection programme had increased her perception of her own competence. However, she cautioned about the lack of input about the importance of research and evidence in undergraduate programmes of study:

> *'… there does however appear to still be barriers to implementing evidence-based practice in undergraduate social work studies.'* (Student: 4, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

Some students reported that colleagues would 'complain' when they spent time doing research, or that colleagues did not recognise that doing research was 'real work'.

> *'Obviously in many ways agencies were supportive in that they released practitioners to participate in the learning tasks. However, on a day to day basis in child protection social work there is a general assumption that if practitioner are sitting at their desks reading or typing they are free to assist in any child protection crisis that arises, and in this way submersion in research is not considered a priority in an increasingly demanding environment.'* (Student: 15, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

> *'This is a very realistic view as within my own team setting complaints have been made from other colleagues about a lack of time in the office base […]. This has clearly highlighted to me that continuous development either evidence-based or otherwise is not seen as paramount within my setting.'* (Student: 2, Cohort: 3, M, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW)

While students did not specifically detail the professional background of their colleagues, it would be reasonable to assume that they would include similarly qualified professionals, which poses important questions about professional development and the commitment to maintaining their own professional standards as required by the SSSC. Parker and Bradley (2000) talk about the sub-cultures that can exist in organisations, and the influence they can have on its overall culture. While the findings from this study may suggest the existence of a culture of anti-intellectualism it appears that such views are held by social workers and managers. but While the Code of Practice for Social Services Workers in Scotland outlines clearly the need for workers to be accountable for the quality of their work and for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills (SSSC, 2002:standard 6), the extent of consensus there is within the profession about the spirit of this code and responsibility for ensuring that social workers met the standard remains open to question.

The narratives regarding organisational commitment to evidence-based practice revealed a confused landscape in terms of understanding and implementation.

> *'… my concern is that the pressures on workers and agencies to justify their practices can lead towards a professional culture that is somehow like evidence-based practice, but is in fact quite different. In day to day social work practice I am aware that the issues of 'evidence' features, often in the use of the jargon verb 'evidence' that features in phrases such as 'how do you evidence that?"* (Student: 11, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 46+yrs, Exp: 20yrs+, Role: SW).

> *'Barriers can be overcome, however, this would need to be supported and implemented at a national and local level in order for frontline practitioners to have the necessary resources, skill base, IT equipment and protected time '* (Student: 32, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

> *'In my own experience the development of evidence-based social work in my own agency is at a very early stage, and I do not see much motivation within the agency to develop evidence-based practice.'* (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Another student acknowledged that it was not until she started the postgraduate certificate that she began to properly understand what EBP actually meant.

> *'Prior to this the common belief within the field was that if someone reads an article then they have somehow become evidence-based practitioners.'* (Student: 14, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Student 20 recognised that academic research was not the only way of determining best practice and that practice wisdom and local experience were equally valid.

> *'… there is no evidence of the value of evidence-based practice and this is true if evidence is only accepted as based entirely in research. Voluntary organisations rely on evidence provided directly from service users, because of the absence of research relevant to the direct practices of the organisations* [sic]*.* (Student: 20, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

However, there does not appear to be any mechanism for transferring practice wisdom within or between organisations. Armstrong and Alsop (2010) highlight

the need for strengthening the capacity of practitioner research within organisations, but the data from this study reveals that, without an attitudinal change at all levels, it is unlikely that individual efforts will prove effective. This study would suggest that organisations may be lacking in effective leadership and resources to ensure that learning is properly supported within the workplace. It is also suggested that while social workers and social work leaders themselves remain ambivalent or uncertain about the role of evidence and research in relation to practice, problems associated with access, support and skills will remain unchanged.

> *'The philosophy underpinning evidence-based practice puts a huge emphasis on the individual worker without the necessary organisational support or the infrastructure to facilitate it'* (Student: 2, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

> *'… social work practitioners further impeded by inadequate time, as a result of increasing organisational and workload pressures, for example, legal processes, recording keeping.'* (Student: 32, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SSW).

One student specifically commented upon the lack of focus within the formal supervision session on the use of research or evidence, and expressed a determination to introduce this into the work she does with her own team:

> *'… in recognising the barriers to embarking on a 'pure' researched based approach, I will introduce and encourage a team approach to accessing systematic reviews through the Cochrane Collaboration or the Campbell Collaboration to develop mine and my team members knowledge base.'* (Student: 16, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

This theme was reflected upon by another student, who recognised the importance of reflection in the supervision relationship:

> *‘ … the ability to critically reflect upon, consider and deeply contemplate social work interventions in order to ascertain the positives and negatives as to their effectiveness, is a fundamental cornerstone of modern day social work’* (Student: 34, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Student 33, a senior social worker, did however demonstrate that his newly acquired research skills had actually enhanced his supervision practice:

> *‘I provide effective and regular practitioner supervision whilst drawing upon my managerial knowledge-base and experience to provide appropriate direction and support to address issues that arise. I have found previous research particularly helpful in my understanding and development of effective supervision.’* (Student: 33, Cohort: 2, M, Age: 46+yrs, Exp: 20+yrs, Role: SSW).

Summary of theme

Students commented upon the culture within their organisation and some claimed that they felt that their employer had not sufficiently recognise the impact that increasing demands and expectations had on their practice. This resonates with the findings of Wilson and Douglas (2007), who also reported on the connection between dissatisfaction about workplace resources and increasing demands on practitioners and engagement with research. The students in this study appear to also recognise the tensions that exist between their own desire to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of current research and evidence and the perception that their organisations cannot or will not support this. This lack of support is not always intentional, but can occur as a result of a lack of resources and the unpredictable, chaotic nature of the job. These tensions confirm the findings of Barratt (2003:149) who states that in order to ensure that research is disseminated adequately throughout social work organisations we will ‘require staff at all levels of social care to ask searching questions about their practice and service outcomes’. Student 33’s reflection about how evidence has informed his own practice as a supervisor indicates the potential for organisations to utilise research to support those in promoted roles

to better support their staff. It is also important to note that those who participated in this module could be viewed as being more motivated towards developing their own knowledge and research skills, and the comments above suggest a growing confidence, married with a level of frustration, at the lack of resources available to assist them to pursue their new skills in the work place.

3.3.3 Core theme 3: Lack of relevant literature

This theme emerged as highly significant for both cohorts. There appeared to be a difference in relation to the students' level of experience since qualifying. More students who had been qualified for less than sixteen years made reference to this theme. It might be inferred that those who had qualified more recently might have more expertise in research activities, as this would have been an expectation of their qualifying degree programme. This may also suggest that this theme may have had more significance for them. This study does not include a comparison of the amount of research that was available in 2009 compared to 2013, nor does it assess the relative quality of the research published between these dates. This is a recognised limitation of this research.

The results resonate with the literature, with Mullen (2008) commenting on the gap between what has been learned through scientific research and what is used in social work policy, administration and direct practice being of concern throughout social work's modern history. This theme, however, reveals that the issue is more complex than just a cry for more research to be done. Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) suggest that there appears to be a 'lack of fit' between what social workers consider themselves to be doing and what the evidence presents to them. The authors cite the apparent disjuncture that often exists between policy and practice, where social workers are expected to conform to methods of engagement that are not supported by the evidence.

Also of interest here is the link between dissatisfaction with the nature and availability of research and the general view that social workers are being asked to work under conditions of increasing stress, due to a lack of resources.

Bellamy *et al* (2006) found that practitioners felt that research evidence was simply a cost-cutting tool, and politically motivated to save money. This inherent disconnect between the outputs and aspirations of researchers and what practitioners need continues to be problematic (Landry *et al,* 2001). While this political issue is of interest, attention needs also to be given to recognising that the nature of the research that is undertaken needs to change. Students spoke of wanting research that is tailored to their specific clients and practice needs, claiming that research findings are not often applicable to their own practice scenario.

> *'I immediately discounted the articles which I felt to be based solely too much on the medical model of intervention. Others with some relevance were deemed to be academically complicated or unclear in their intentions, making them very difficult to read.'* (Student: 29, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SSW).

> *'Throughout the critique of the research there are many different assertions regarding what is the best intervention method, reasons for outcomes and causes of significant issues. Due to the diversity of the findings, it could be difficult to identify appropriate, robust research and implement to into day to day practice.'* (Student: 36, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Students also commented specifically on the lack of research that had a multi-disciplinary component. Most child protection practice takes place in multi-disciplinary settings, but as yet there appears to be limited research that includes this dimension.

> *'There was some research from a social care setting and no indication that multi-agency research had been undertaken into the subject.'* (Student: 3, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

> *'Executing a literature research on 'inter-agency working in child protection services' presented information from a variety of sources (children and families, disabilities, mental health, nursing and health related fields) and failed to provide enough specific information from which to assess and draw conclusions from.'* [sic] (Student: 30, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

As previously noted in the literature review, the time that it takes for research to be published is a problem for practitioners. Thyer (2004) puts the time lag at about three to four years, but Bellamy suggests that in some cases there can be a fifteen-year lag between the research taking place and the publication of the results (Bellamy *et al,* 2006). By the time that research is actually published it can often be out of date.

> *'The core weakness in relation to much of the gathered research was that a number of the relevant research articles were dated, and somewhere over [sic] ten years old.'* (Student: 15, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Another student cautioned that the quality of some research might in fact be poor, as studies tend to focus on small sample groups, which do not give a representative picture. While this appears to contradict:

> *' … some of the evidence may be poor quality or due to the limited numbers involved in a piece of research does not give a true representation of the larger audience which may cause undue panic*.' (Student: 18, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SSW).

One of the students in this research made an interesting and, I think, important comment on the nature of the evidence that they are being presented with and expected to just accept:

> *'The research used to develop the framework (the Department of Health Framework) is based on middle class values and assumptions in relation to parenting and outcomes for families etc. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the DoH framework sought the views of front-line social work staff and this would suggest to me that the views of front line staff are inferior compared to the views of politicians and academics who it might be argued are out of touch with the realities of front line social work.'* (Student: 17, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

This point is supported by another student who questioned whether or not research could be trusted, and questioned the validity of the researcher as the holder of 'the truth'.

> '*Research findings are themselves only constructs of the researcher or the research team.*' (Student: 1, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

Summary of theme

It is clear from the data that students are mindful of the material, political and cognitive contexts in which they practice and understand that research is part of this complex dynamic. For EBP to be more relevant to practitioners, Barratt (2003:144) suggests that evidence must be 'multifaceted, broad-based and carefully targeted'. Students were aware that the research that was available to them did not always relate to their own practice context. Students appeared to recognise the need for research that is inter-disciplinary and context-specific. If current research is not perceived as relevant, it is possible that social workers will cease to consider research as something that can enhance their practice. This theme also suggests that insufficient attention is given to the perspective of the front line social worker in the research. This is an important message and one that encapsulates current problems with an EBP approach and the need to consider more inclusive research practices.

3.3.4 Core theme 4: Lack of critical research appraisal skills

The literature review revealed that one of the most common and perhaps surprising barriers to the implementation of EBP are the psychological barriers that practitioners experience. Bellamy *et al* (2006:4) refer to these as 'knowledge barriers'. Knowledge barriers reflect the lack of skills and awareness that practitioners often experience in relation to accessing, understand and critically appraising research findings. The reality is that few students access scholarly journals and, when they do, many find it difficult to translate and apply the findings to their practice setting. Also of interest is that those qualified the longest ($n \geq 16$ yrs) reported this as a barrier much more frequently.

The students offered quite specific concerns with regard to their lack of skills in relation to appraising and analysing the literature and formulating appropriate research questions:

> *'… indeed undertaking a literature search is very time consuming and unless specific training has been given in analysing research data the process can be overwhelming.'* (Student: 28, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

> *'Very few practitioners were able to articulate what specific evidence they were referring to*.' (Student:18, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

The comment above acknowledges the difficulties students have in properly formulating research questions, which in turn makes it more problematic and time consuming for them to know what to search for in terms of research.

> '*It is questionable whether practitioners need additional training to undertake such an involved and almost specialised research task or whether systems to support transfer of knowledge from research centres*

*to practitioners are more appropriate.' (*Student: 19, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

This quote, as presented by a student, synthesises the dual concern about lack of skills on the part of the students and the need for researchers to consider more accessible forms of knowledge transfer. Students below also commented on the obscure nature of academic language and how this also created a barrier to accessing research. These comments illustrate the potential for real and concerning gaps to emerge in the translation of research into practice. Language conveys meaning, and if this meaning is obscured, then the message is open to interpretation and possible corrupting.

'The language and terminology barrier was certainly something which I encountered, with a dictionary being frequently referred to whilst reading various articles.' (Student: 23, Cohort: 1, M, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

'Some research was difficult to understand, particularly as research is often not written in a way which is easily accessible.' (Student: 15, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

'An accessible presentation style will improve the likelihood that the knowledge will be used in practice.' (Student: 7, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

The 2013 cohort, however, appeared to rate language as being of less importance. Both students acknowledged a lack of skills and application on their own part. While these views presented an interesting contrast to those above, they also highlighted the lack of skills and time that it takes for students to access the research that they need.

'… upon reflection I did not always have control of my literature review …'. (Student: 36, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp:11-20yrs, Role: SW).

'I found myself getting further away from my research question and becoming overwhelmed with the amount of information.' (Student: 33, Cohort: 2, M, Age: 46+yrs, Exp: 20+yrs, Role: SSW).

Summary of theme

As outlined in Chapter 1, all qualified social services workers and employers of social service staff are regulated by the SSSC and are required to adhere to their Code of Practice. The code outlines for employers that they 'must provide training and development opportunities to enable social services workers to strengthen and develop their skills' (Code 3 for Employers). Social services workers are also required to 'be accountable for the quality of your work and to take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills' (Code 6 for Workers).

The perceived lack of knowledge and skills by qualified social workers should be recognised as a serious issue by employers. Social workers are supposed to employ analytical skills to assess the needs of, and potential risks faced by, service users. Those who have postgraduate qualifications in social work are required to demonstrate strong analytical thinking and writing skills. These skills are the same as those needed to formulate research questions and conduct literature searches. It appears that these skills are either lost or atrophy during the transition from qualification to established practitioner. It may be that practitioners do not recognise that they already possess the skill set necessary to access evidence, but either way this issue needs to be considered in the context of qualifying education as well as in post-qualifying leaning. It would be reasonable for someone outside the profession to question the basis and legitimacy of social work intervention, if social work practitioners do not have the skills required to access the evidence they need from which they can inform their practice.

3.4.5 Core theme 5: Lack of IT skills

While there was no perceptible gender difference in the other themes, it was notable that none of the male students noted this as a barrier to their studies. This barrier was highlighted by both cohorts, but was not raised by those who had been qualified less than 5 years. In general terms, this appears to be more of a barrier for those who have been qualified the longest and possibly are in an older age group. These findings suggest that a lack of confidence in using technology to search and access research is contributing to the lack of engagement with research. Students commented that the requirement to use electronic search engines and the module discussion board raised anxiety amongst some members of the group.

> *'This raised anxiety amongst us all, especially those with limited access time and skills...'.* (Student: 5, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

While this theme is concerning, it was interesting to note that one student recognised that poor IT skills may be due to a lack of opportunity practice rather than incompetence:

> *'… once the process of searching the database was practised a few times, it became easier, quicker and more focused.'* (Student: 5, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

The theme was continued by another student, who commented that it was their lack of skill that made the task of searching electronic databases frustrating and time consuming:

> *'… I do not have the skills in utilising the databases which causes my frustrations as opposed to time.'* (Student: 1, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

The lack of learning opportunities in which students can actually practice their skills clearly has an impact on the time spent doing research, as well as on the nature of the research that is discovered:

> *'I would avoid using university library search tools as previous attempts had produced so many documents I did not know where to start.'* (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

This student goes on:

> *'I found myself prone to 'cheating' my searches by using The British Journal of Social Work as I felt safe.'* (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

The same student recognised that her studies had provided the motivation that she needed to practice her search skills and concluded:

> *'… to my surprise I no longer found this process daunting or overwhelming, my refined and strategic search terms guided me through the research that was relevant to my studies.'* (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Summary of theme

While it appears that the younger students had more confidence in their IT skills than those who were older, the problem still appears to be significant and is something that educators and employers need to recognise and engage with in the future. Despite efforts to ensure that students have a proper induction to the library and how to use electronic search engines, it is clear that these students still found the task daunting. Additional support and information, as well as more opportunities to practice the skills required, should be considered in teaching and workforce development. The recent introduction of 'hot desking' is unlikely

to encourage people to spend time practising their skills in this area. Equally, we need to consider other ways of disseminating evidence and knowledge. The primary method of dissemination of academic research is through journals that are now available electronically. While open access may make access more democratic, the problem with actually searching and locating the evidence that would prove helpful to students remains unchallenged by this process.

3.4.6 Core theme 6: Lack of access to IT facilities and literature

Nationally, with IRISS for example, the focus of research dissemination networks has been the development of web-based facilities and resources, yet access to information technology varies enormously across social services organisations and many practitioners have little or no access to digital resources (Barratt, 2003). This has been reflected in this study, with highest numbers of dissatisfaction being reported in those qualified for more than 16 years. Again the data does not provide a rationale for this, but perhaps those in the longer-qualified group had access to their own computers and were more comfortable in using them in their own time. It may be that this group were able to view accessing literature in their leisure time as something they could easily do on their laptops or tablets etc., while those qualified for longer periods of time had become used to using IT while at work and were less comfortable or familiar with using it at home or in their own time.

Moseley (2004) reports that there is insufficient access to electronic resources for those working in the care sector. Increasingly, social work staff are being required to ‘hot desk’, which means that they have no guaranteed workstation or access to a computer. Students made comments about the lack of access to a computer and the Internet:

> *‘If today’s vehicle for dissemination of research is the Internet in the workplace, the writer would propose that not having unrestricted access to the Internet in the workplace […] would be a fairly reasonable prohibiting factor.’* (Student: 25, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

Others noted that their organisations did not subscribe to any journals or electronic research:

> *'While there were restrictions by the University on how many journals they subscribe to, it was significantly better access than in my workplace, as there are no subscriptions to any data bases or journals.'* (Student: 22, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).
>
> *'I found it very frustrating to be told that the area team where I am based, which houses a vast amount of social workers covering all areas of social work, do not have subscribe to any of the leading social work journals, nor is permission given to access the internet without signing off work to ensure that you access in your own time.'* (Student: 18, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp; 2-10yrs, Role: SSW).
>
> *'… I found the ASSIA online database […] really helpful in narrowing search findings. However, I no longer have access to this site.'* (Student 36: Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2 yrs, SW).
>
> *'… workers would need to be supplied with access to relevant data bases to source research.'* (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

It is perhaps surprising that Student 18 is a SSW and had not been aware that her organisation did not have a subscription to social work journals, but this lack of access to relevant literature appears to be a common feature across both cohorts. It is also interesting to note that students focussed most predominantly on academic research as the main source of evidence. Alternative forms of evidence exist, but did not seem to register within the context of this study.

Summary of theme

While this theme represents the lowest number of comments, it was still an important theme. The data suggests that there is still a problem within the workforce over the ability to access technology and literature in order to enhance practice skills. The literature review revealed the lack of a properly considered strategy for the dissemination of research literature. Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) state that it is clear that present arrangements for sharing knowledge, such as didactic training courses, on-line portals, conference presentations, academic journals, policy statements and post-qualifying courses, have little impact on the behaviour of social workers. What we now require is for researchers, educators and practitioners to come together to consider how to more effectively disseminate the rich and growing body of social work research and evidence, so that it can be directly applied to practice. Approaches to knowledge transfer are strongly influenced by an organisation's epistemological beliefs (Fazey *et al*, 2014). There are definite signs that the relationship between society and science is changing, and the relationship between research and practice needs to be reimagined to become more accessible and democratic.

3.4.7 Additional sub-themes

This section draws together themes that emerged which did not fit under any of the key themes highlighted above. In line with qualitative research traditions, the fact that these sub-themes where mentioned by only one student does not make them less meaningful. The following sub-themes were identified:

1. Ethical dilemmas in child protection social work: interestingly, only one student commented upon the ethical dilemmas involved in child protection practice and research.

'… ethical considerations should play a major role in evidence-based practice but this may be particularly difficult for practitioners to manage.' (Student: 1, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

Ethical considerations often impact on the process of conducting research in the field of child protection. This is further compounded by the difficulties that researchers often have in gaining access the vulnerable groups. This dilemma necessitates more consideration, as new ways need to be found for researchers and practitioners to work together to find ways of accessing vulnerable service user groups while maintaining the highest ethical standards. New partnerships need to be created between academics, practitioners and service users to ensure that research is relevant and appropriate to the needs of service users, and also meets the rigorous standards of academic peer reviewed research.

2. Lack of opportunities for practitioners to become involved in research. Despite initiatives such as IRISS and WithScotland, the link between practice and higher education needs to further considered. One student in the 2013 cohort did, however, recognise the need for greater collaboration between research and practice:

'… from consultation with my colleagues it would seem that frontline practitioners have little role in the translation of research into practice.' (Student: 31, Cohort: 2, F, Age: 36-45yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW).

However, another recognised that there are few opportunities to practice the skills and apply the research knowledge that they have gained on the postgraduate programme:

'There is a distinct lack of opportunity within the practice environment to further strengthen and develop these skills through regular use it is likely that these newly gained skills weaken over time.' (Student: 15: Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 11-20yrs, Role: SW.).

The fact that other students did not specifically mention this issue could indicate that such opportunities are so rare as to not have any real relevance to practitioners. It is also notable that the two students who did recognise this problem were from different cohorts, suggesting that the situation still requires attention.

3. Some students demonstrated a lack of self-motivation in regard to their own professional development, particularly when they were required to give up their own time to further enhance their practice through the use of evidence or new knowledge:

   '… in a genuine practice setting practitioners cannot be expected to use their personal time to undertake literature reviews and database searches, arrangements would have to be made to incorporate evidence-based practices into daily working life.' (Student: 9, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SD).

This quote was from someone working in a staff development role. It may be that this response is one that they receive from social workers when trying to engage them in staff development opportunities, however it is a revealing comment as it speaks to the views of students about their own professional obligation to attend to their own ongoing learning and development as per the SSSC Code of Practice. Here we can see evidence of the ongoing debate in social work about the place of research evidence in practice. Is research something that is merely an optional extra, or can it be something that is integrated but requires a commitment to new skills and knowledge?

4. While students did not highlight the contested nature of evidence in sufficient numbers to merit it becoming a key theme in this research, it was certainly something that was commented upon in several of the assignments:

> *'… it is hard as a practitioner to outline what is classed as evidence and more importantly sound and valid forms of it.'* (Student: 4: Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW).

Summary of additional sub-themes

These sub-themes are important, not only in relation to the nature of the views expressed, but also because they were not highlighted more often, as they are clearly relevant to the assignment task, representing additional barriers to the use of evidence and research in child protection practice. The assignment task did not require students to go through the University of Dundee ethical approval process, but social workers are bound by the SSSC Code of Practice (2009). It is of note that this code does not specifically mention 'ethics', but it does state that 'as a social services worker, you must protect the rights and interests of service users and carers' (SSSC, 2009: Code 1 for Registrants).

The additional sub-themes highlight an important dilemma in relation to the role of research in practice. On one hand, we had students 15 and 31 highlighting the lack of opportunities for them to be involved in research, while on the other hand, student 9 highlighted the concern that practitioners should not have to use their own time to update themselves about research findings. This second point indicates that time for considering research findings is not something that is routinely seen as part of the working day, but rather as something that is an optional extra that should be undertaken in personal time. This view is more than just a recognition that there is not enough time for students to consider research in their working day - it is a wider recognition that time for research is not even considered as a legitimate use of work time. The final sub-theme also highlights confusion about the nature of evidence and what constitutes good research. These additional sub-themes are important, as they rightly bring to our attention the complex context in which child protection social work practice is taking place, and the tensions therein. If we are to progress the idea that practice and research need to work more closely together, these themes need to be properly considered in this debate.

3.5 Conclusion

The aim of this empirical study was to examine the views of students, as expressed in their written assignments, who are also social work child protection practitioners on evidence-based practice within the context of their everyday practice. It might be considered that the data presents nothing more than a list of excuses from students in order to justify their lack of engagement with literature and research. However, it will be demonstrated below that these results are broadly consistent with related studies such as those conducted by Bellamy *et al,* 2006; Kitson *et.al*. 1998; Rosenbaum, Glenton and Cracknell, 2008.

The data was analysed by way of a thematic content analysis of student essays from two cohorts of students, four years apart. The study has found that the findings from these students are broadly consistent with findings from the literature and from other related disciplines: evidence-based practice is not an effective method for transferring knowledge (Cree, Macrae, Smith, Knowles, O'Halloran, Sharpe and Wallace, 2014). Barriers to accessing the evidence are manifestly difficult to overcome. Organisational cultures appear to inhibit the individual from personal inquiry, and do little to develop collective learning. Despite rhetoric about social service organisations becoming learning organisations, it is clear from the study and the literature that there is still much to be done to actively encourage the creation, sharing and evaluation of new knowledge within social services in Scotland.

This chapter outlined the key findings from the data and a discussion of these in relation to the literature. In the next chapter I will consider these findings and my analysis in the context of the research question, and I will make recommendations for practice, policy and research. Munro (1998:25-26) suggests that social work has an 'anti-scientific ethos' with a lack of empirical basis to support the effectiveness or otherwise of much of the competing perspectives that are presented. She then goes on to suggest that this lack of empirical evidence has led to a workforce and practice framework that do not adequately utilise the research that is available. While Munro highlights the lack

of research literacy amongst social workers, reflecting that this stems from a lack of systematic application of research principles such as evaluation and review to social work practice, these fears still persist today, and are indeed reflected in the empirical study presented in this thesis.

Students' comments in the written assignments did, in the main, conform to the literature review. In relation to the implementation of EBP, the literature highlights the following key barriers: (1) agreement on the nature of evidence, (2) a strategic approach to the creation of evidence and the development of a cumulative knowledge base, (3) effective dissemination of knowledge together with the development of effective means for access to knowledge, (4) initiatives to increase the use of evidence in both policy and practice, and (5) a variety of action steps at the organisational level (Kitson *et al,* 1998). While these barriers were highlighted in 1998, it appears from this study that they are still relevant today. Student 4 highlighted the enduring concern about the nature of evidence in social work child protection practice and research today, and it remains unclear what forums are available in which these dilemmas can be debated and revisited by practitioners, service users and researchers to ensure that future research is both relevant and shared.

The second barrier as outlined by Kitson *et al* (1998), suggests that the lack of a strategic approach to the creation of evidence and a cumulative knowledge base is at the core of the argument that I made at the beginning of this study. I stated that this study had started as a relatively straightforward examination of the understanding that social work students have about the role of evidence-based practice (EBP) in relation to their daily practice. However, on reviewing the literature, it became clear that the important question is not about the nature or understanding of EBP but about research knowledge and the generating and transfer of it across social work organisations.

Again, reflecting the barriers outlined by Kitson *et al* (1998), the comment above also highlights problems in relation to the dissemination of research within social services organisations. While organisations such as IRISS and the SSSC are arguably trying to develop a cumulative knowledge base, the reality shows

that their attempts still require a great deal of practitioner engagement to properly move them from being simply well-intentioned communities of practice to becoming national platforms for knowledge creation and transfer. This study did highlight very clearly that practitioners are still hampered by a lack of access to knowledge and do not recognise any national or organisational efforts to effectively disseminate it.

The lack of organisational action to support the development and transfer of knowledge was given a very high status in this study. This inaction was linked strongly to the financial and resource context in which practice is currently taking place, but students also recognised unsupportive attitudes towards professional development and a lack of training and educational opportunities. As mentioned earlier by Bellamy *et al* (2006), it has been suggested that some practitioners feel that research evidence is being used as a cost-cutting tool, and politically motivated to save resources and, while this was not mentioned specifically by students the inherent disconnect between the aspirations of researchers and what practitioners are being asked to do continues to be problematic. As I have suggested in the literature review, this study confirms my view that in order for EBP to be more relevant to practitioners, research needs to take on board the material, political and cognitive contexts in which social work is routinely practised, and move towards a position where research is viewed as something that is situated in practice and in the lived experience of those who use social work services.

Finally, this study also reflected concerns about the lack of effective methods for the dissemination of knowledge together with the development of effective means for access to knowledge. Rosenbaum *et al* (2008) make it clear that evidence-based decision-making relies on easy access to trustworthy research findings. Practitioners still appear to find this problematic. It remains clear that, despite rhetoric about ‘learning organisations’ and ‘communities of practice’, the reality is that practitioners are still not feeling adequately supported by their organisations in relation to their professional learning needs. The reality is that few practitioners access scholarly journals and, even when they do, many find them difficult to translate into their practice setting. Some attempts have been

made to develop web-based networks for the dissemination of relevant high quality research, such as the work done by IRISS and SSSC. However, it is apparent from this study that while the situation is improving, access to information technology varies enormously across social service organisations and many practitioners have little or no access to digital resources (Barratt 2003).

It was argued in the literature that while traditional critiques of evidence-based practice recognise the barriers to its implementation, they do not offer alternative solutions or approaches. However, the data from this study supports my claim that there is a need to develop alternative, more adaptive and creative methodologies to encourage co-production of knowledge between researcher, practitioner and service users. Kazdin (2008) said that researchers and practitioners would more likely come together if both sides focused on improved outcomes for children. This must, however, be matched with adequate processes and systems for ensuring that the resultant evidence is effectively shared across all the domains, including practice, policy, and research and, of course, service users. Service users need to properly understand what practitioners are doing and why, and to believe that their interventions will be of benefit to them and their families.

New partnerships need to be created between academics, practitioners and service users to ensure that research is relevant and appropriate to the needs of service users, and also meets the rigorous standards of academic peer reviewed research. I argued in the literature review in Chapter 1 of this study that knowledge translation provides some interesting perspectives in relation to the role of evidence and research in practice and the apparent reluctance of social workers to engage with the research community (Gray and Schubert, 2012:204). I further argued that social work has tended to think about research as something that is generated or produced by academics and applied by practitioners. Knowledge translation science encourages us to consider the generation of knowledge in a wider context, including not only academic knowledge but interprofessional and service user knowledge, essentially representing a more participatory and egalitarian model of knowledge

generation, or what Alexanderson *et al,* call a ‘synthesis of knowledge’ (Alexanderson *et al,* 2009:136).

Chapter 4: A New Model for Knowledge Transfer in Child Protection Social Work

This chapter draws together the findings and proposes a new model for considering how the key themes identified be conceptualised into a new model for knowledge transfer in child protection social work. This new model moves thinking on from the model of evidence based practice as outlined by Schlonsky and Gibb (2004) which relied on three domains: best evidence; practitioner individual expertise and client values and expectations. While the Schlonsky and Gibb model draws our attention to the value of practitioner knowledge, it fails to incorporate service user knowledge and the material, political and social aspects of professional knowledge.

The new model that is proposed starts by considering existing models of decision making in child protection social work, in particular the most influential model as depicted by Drury-Hudson in 1997, and considers if this is still fit for purpose in the context of the findings from this study. It became clear that the Drury-Hudson model is no longer sufficient in the context of the increasing complexities of child protection social work. A new matrix for considering decision making was required (Figure 7) which considered the wider social and political context in which decisions are made. These factors were then located within a theoretical perspective that drew upon aspects of socio-material theories, including ANT and SNA and a new model of knowledge transfer in child protection social work was developed (Figure 8).

The remainder of this chapter will outline how this new thinking contributes to our existing knowledge and goes on to explore how a new model of knowledge transfer can move current thinking on from thinking of knowledge as something that is privileged, hierarchical and within the domain of the individual, to something that is democratic, socially and politically situated and materially dynamic.

4.1 Contribution to existing knowledge

This study considered the extant literature in relation to EPB in social work and knowledge transfer across a range of professions. New perspectives on professional learning were explored in the literature review which positions professional learning in the domain of the political, social and material world. This theoretical perspective has not been considered the context of social work professional learning, but it sheds an interesting new perspectives on how material, social and political factors come together in ways which can enhance or detract from the individual actor's ability and willingness to engage with their own professional learning and was therefore wider in scope than traditional reviews of EBP. I have not outlined all previous studies that had been undertaken, as these have been well rehearsed in the past. However, the findings from this study do broadly confirm the limits of EBP as outlined by Gibbs and Gambrill (2002); Mullen and Streiner (2004); Bellamy *et al* (2006); Bellamy et al (2008); Wilson and Douglas (2007); Gibbs and Bellamy (2008) and Cree *et al* (2014).

I argued in the literature review that questions about the role of evidence-based practice as a conceptual framework for informing child protection practice are largely redundant. It appears to be more helpful to now consider wider questions about the nature of knowledge and what knowledge means in both an academic and practice sense. My approach to this study was to move this debate into an area that is likely to provide more practical and relevant solutions. This entailed considering how knowledge might be transferred more effectively across all of the agencies and actors involved in child protection social work. By better understanding these mechanisms we can begin to understand the true nature of the social work task in all of its complexity and begin to consider how to use this to best effect in the services that are delivered. To begin this process we must look to the work that has already begun in other equally complex and contested fields of practice. As highlighted in the results chapter, one of the students in this study questioned whether or not research could be trusted and questioned the status of the researcher as the holder of 'the truth'. This student expressed a view that 'research findings are themselves only constructs of the researcher or the research team'

(Stundent: 1, Cohort: 1, F, Age: 25-35yrs, Exp: 2-10yrs, Role: SW). This is an important statement and one that goes to the core of the problem we have with our current model of knowledge transfer in child protection social work.

4:2 A new model of knowledge transfer in child protection social work

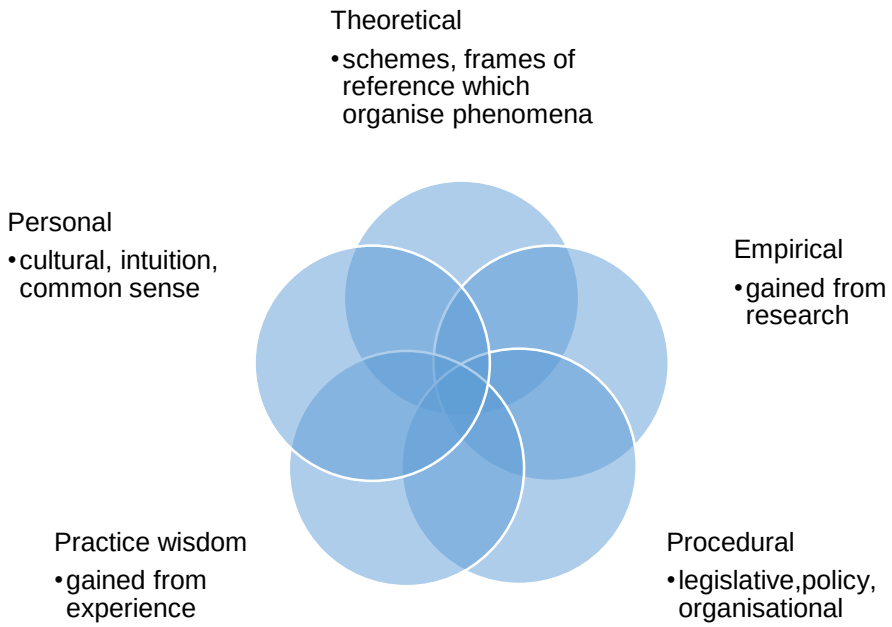
4.2.1 Decision making

After analysing the data in the context of the literature, it became clear that a new model was required for conceptualising how knowledge is transferred in child protection social work. While it is recognised throughout the literature review that the concept of knowledge transfer is now well established in professional areas such as education and policing, I have argued that this concept is only now emerging in relation to social work research. There are signs within organisations such as IRISS that knowledge sharing is growing in importance and we are seeing online initiatives that are similar to the Mapping Educational Specialist 'KnowHow' initiative, (MESH) in Education. However, like MESH, these initiatives still focus on notions of evidence and scientific based knowledge and are designed to be repositories of such evidence. While such tools have some utility, it is clear from this study that accessing basic online resources is problematic as many practitioners do not have the time, resources or in some cases the skills and knowledge that is required to take advantage of these repositories of knowledge. With this in mind, I have highlighted the key barriers that need to be addressed to better enable knowledge to be more effectively produced and shared.

In order to contextualise this new approach, I have considered at Figure 6, the work of Drury-Hudson (1997), who has previously outlined the five inter-related areas that come together to inform child protection decision making. Designed in 1997, this model is still in use today. This model for depicting the inter-relationship between different types of knowledge *relies on traditional ways of understanding how knowledge is acquired and shared, including an emphasis*

on empirical knowledge and the personal attributes of the practitioner, recognising practice wisdom and procedural knowledge as part of this model.

Figure 6: Model for depicting the inter-relationship between different types of knowledge



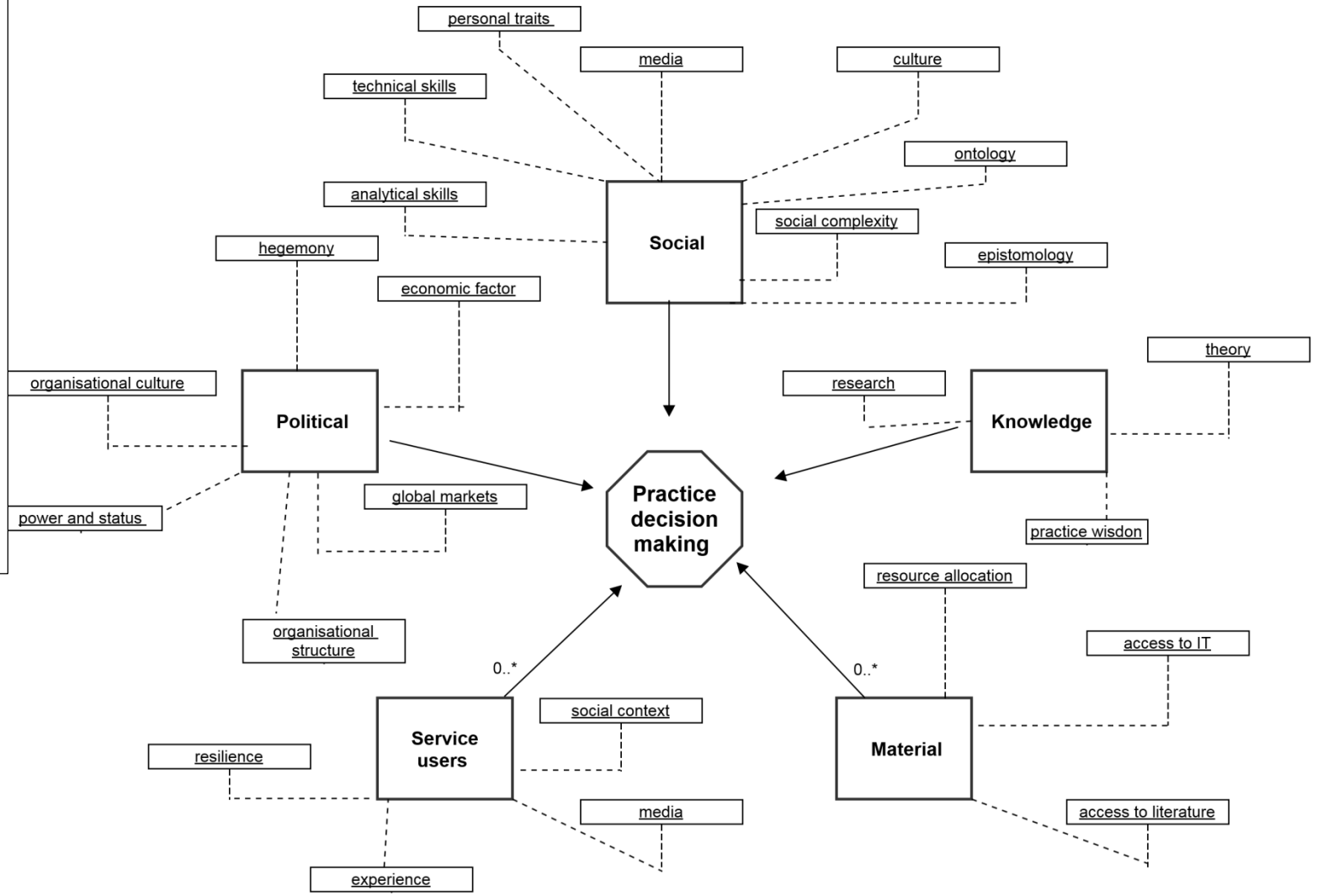
(Drury-Hudson 1997:150)

This framework does not recognise the more informal forms of knowledge of the wider political, social and material factors that impact on social worker decision making. The data from this study, along with my analysis of the literature, suggests that an alternative model is now required.

Figure 7 illustrates how we should begin to combine the domains of knowledge expressed by Drury-Hudson with the key findings from this study. This figure outlines the themes that I consider to be relevant in relation to practice knowledge and decision making in contemporary child protection social work. It can be seen that I have combined theory and empirical knowledge under the one heading as these inform each other in practice. I have also re-considered procedural knowledge as political since organisations are now heavily influenced by political factors such as the integration of health and social care and the privatisation of services. I have added a social sphere as factors such as the media and personal skills and traits and values inform the nature of

knowledge that we rely upon. The material sphere is also an important new addition as it recognises the impact that the material environment has on our ability to access knowledge and inform our decisions. I have retained the personal sphere but have adapted it to include the media and personal views about the nature of knowledge. Finally, I have added a service user sphere. If knowledge is to be usefully applied and used to improve outcomes for children and families, then the addition of this area of knowledge is fundamental to our understanding.

Figure 7: Decision making in practice

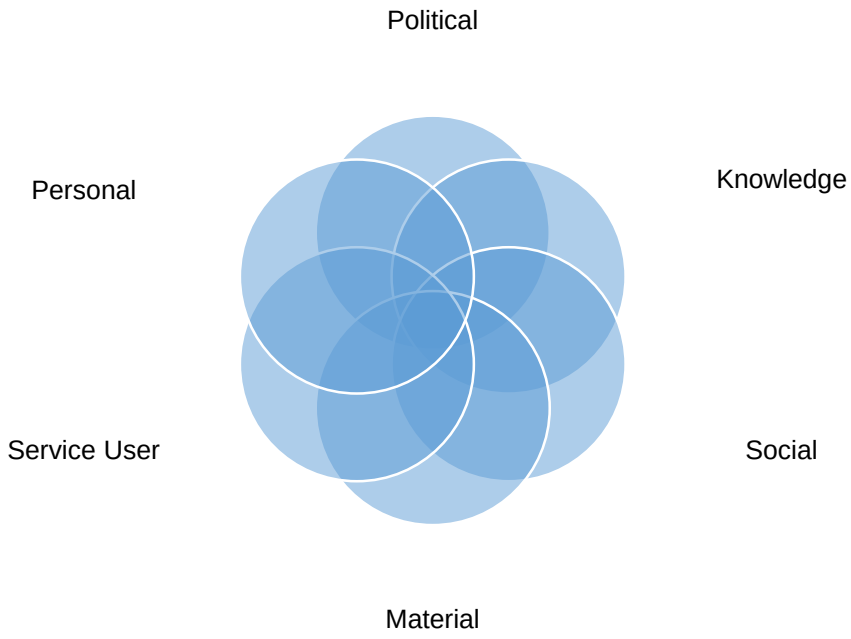


4.3 A new model for knowledge transfer in child protection social work

Figure 7 provides a useful conceptual framework for considering the factors that impact on practitioners when making decisions in a social work child protection context. By drawing together key themes it is possible to identify how these could be further developed and conceptualised into a new model for knowledge transfer in child protection social work. Importantly, this new model should not be viewed as something that is static, but rather as something that is dynamic and evolving over time to reflect the relevance and importance of each sphere in the context of the complex and dynamic systems that present themselves in each individual child protection practice situation.

Combining the domains outlined in figure 7 with themes that have emerged from the theories explored but never previously been considered in child protection social work, it is now possible to conceptualise a new model knowledge transfer in this area of social work (figure 8). By incorporating the data and analysis from this study and by considering a wider conceptual framework that includes socio-material theories and new models for knowledge transfer we can now consider not only the personal and hierarchical and formal forms of knowledge to something that incorporates a consideration for the factors and actors that can act as both enablers and barriers to knowledge transfer within social work organisations.

Figure 8 Model of knowledge transfer in child protection social work



In the literature review I drew upon a wide range of theories and perspective from which to consider the findings from this study. While no one theory informed the analysis it is clear that the findings strongly support the view that political factors, (global economics, power and status, organisational culture and national hegemony), social factors (media, culture, personal traits), knowledge (theory, research, practice wisdom), material (resources, access to technology and literature) and service users factors (experience, resilience).

This new model places emphasis on the real lived experiences of social workers and service users which recognises that for evidence, knowledge or research to have an impact on the services that social workers provide to those whose lives are caught up in the child protection system, we need to recognise that knowledge is not something that is static and within the domain of the individual, but is rather something that is dynamic and dependent upon not only the individual social worker but their organisation and the experience and knowledge of the service user. The new model also recognises that

barriers can impede the transfer of knowledge and that these barriers need to be recognised in order to consider what is supporting and what is impeding knowledge being exchanged across all domains within the system.

It was recognised in the literature review that knowledge exchange is not a tool but is ‘a process of generating, sharing, and/or using knowledge through various methods appropriate to the context, purpose, and students involved’ (Fazey *et al*, 2013:20). While opportunities for knowledge acquisition and dissemination may occur at various points within an organisation, we should never underestimate the barriers that practitioners and organisations face and we should be mindful of these when embarking on any programme of knowledge transfer. This new model demonstrates that by simultaneously holding in our mind both the factors that impact constructively on sharing knowledge and the barriers that can impede knowledge sharing, and locating our understanding in a wider socio-material context, we can better consider how social work organisations can make more effective and efficient use of the wide range of knowledge and experience that exists within the sphere of child protection practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

'I appeal to you, measure, evaluate, estimate, appraise your results in some form, in any terms that rest on anything beyond faith, assertion and the 'illustrative case'. Let us do this for ourselves before some less knowledgeable and less gentle body takes us by the shoulders and pushes us into the street'. (Cabot, 1931:6)

This chapter is presented in seven parts. In the first section I will briefly revisit the research question and the attendant suppositions. In the second section I will discuss how the findings contribute to existing knowledge. In the third section I will outline a new model for knowledge transfer in child protection social work. The fourth section will discuss the implications and makes recommendations for research, policy and practice and education and in the fifth section. The fifth section will consider some of the limitations of this study and part six will outline plans for expanding this study. The last section will close with some final thoughts and reflections.

This thesis started out as a review of how social work child protection practitioners understood the barriers that were preventing them from adopting an evidence-based approach to their practice. These views were expressed through a formal academic assignment. The students began their programme of study with differing levels of knowledge about the concept of EBP and how research evidence could inform their practice. This is reflected in some of the direct quotes in this study. However, it is also fair to say that the final assignments would suggest that by the end of the module, the students had gained a much more critical awareness and understanding of the concept of EBP and its utility for their practice.

5.1 The research question

The research question and suppositions were outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The data from this study clearly indicated that barriers still exist in relation to knowledge transfer in child protection social work. The study identified six key barriers and these very closely reflect the barriers as outlined in the literature (Anderson *et al,* 1999; Mullen and Streiner, 2004; Mullen and Bellamy, 2008; Cree *et al,* 2014; Scurlock-Evans and Upton, 2015). The study by Bellamy *et al* (2006:28) concluded that 'knowledge barriers' presented a real barrier to the implantation of EBP in social work. Knowledge barriers reflect the lack of skills and awareness that practitioners often experience in relation to accessing, understanding and critically evaluating research findings.

This study revealed that practitioners found that much academic research to be not always irrelevant to their practice situation. It is clear that there is still a lack of fit between research outputs of academics, and what is required by practitioners. I believe that this problem can be seen as more acute when we consider the attitudes of organisations towards research and the problematic organisational cultures that pervade in some social work organisations. Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) argued in 2002 that practitioners believed researchers to be only interested in publishing findings that will enhance their reputation and are less interested in the routine work of daily practice. It appears that their views remain valid today. From this study it appears that problematic cultures are evident on all sides of the research/practice continuum. It is clear that in order for research to be more relevant to practitioners and ultimately to contributing to improving outcomes for children, researchers needs to take on board the material, political and cognitive contexts in which social work is routinely practised.

In this study I have commented that evidence and knowledge need to be considered in the context of improving outcomes for service users. The contested notion of the service user needs to be acknowledged at this point. The aetiology of service user inclusion lies within contradictory discourses of participation that have been influenced by differing social, political and historical forces (Jackson and Kelly, 2015). Two major philosophies of participation have however emerged; a rights-based discourse that is underpinned by concepts of social justice and self-determination (Morris and Connelly, 2012) and modernist constructs of consumerism that position service users as customers (Gallagher and Smith, 2010). In a rights-based model, there is an expectation that the service user can participate and engage with service providers with more or less equal status. However, a consumerist model appears to view the services user as a consumer exercising freedom of choice within a mixed economy of service provision. However, Jackson and Kelly (2015) concur with Bagum (2006) and Ferguson (2008) and argue that consumerist discourses are more focussed on creating economic efficiencies within the welfare marketplace and the managerialist agenda associated with the 'new right' conservative governments of the 1980s / early 1990s and handed down to successive Labour governments since. It is important to recognise these tensions in any consideration of how service users might become more equal participants in the knowledge transfer process in social work. While it is recognised that some social scientists are beginning to work in this way, for example Fazey and Fenwick, there is a need for these approaches to become more common in social work. This will not only enrich our research but will generate a hermeneutic circle of knowledge and reflection to ensure that we produce research that is not only relevant, but that pays attention to how professionals learn and apply this learning to their practice.

We also need to acknowledge the difficulty that researchers have in gaining access to those children and families who are part of the child protection system. As a researcher, I have found it difficult to get local authorities to engage with opportunities for research. When we do find partners, they appear to remain primarily concerned with the possible reputational damage

that might result from the research findings. While it should never be the intention for researchers to set out to undermine the work that is being done in practice, I will argue that researchers have become so reliant upon organisational partners as a means of gaining access to children, families and vulnerable populations, that it is now difficult to design research projects that are genuinely open to better learning. For the sake of the children and families we seek to serve we should note that 'we serve children better when we share our learning' (Devaney, 2013:3).

This discussion will now consider the suppositions that supported the research question and use the analysis from the data to consider the findings in the context of the literature.

Supposition 1

> *Do child protection social workers understand the nature and usefulness of evidence and knowledge and how it impacts on their practice?*

Despite the communities of practice literature, by authors such as Wenger (1998) and Edmonds-Cady and Sosulski (2012), that emphasises the importance of collaboration and learning within the context of work, we are still failing to take into account the complex work and learning context in which child protection social work takes place. Despite their participation in the postgraduate certificate, the students in this study remain on the periphery of knowledge generation and transfer in its wider context.

The literature recognises the complexity of the child protection task (Laming 2003; Munro 2011). This concept of complexity was also explored in the literature review in the context of professional learning. It set out the case for learning that occurs within and between networks and actors and should be viewed as something that is dynamic and complex *(*Hood, 2014). Fenwick (2012a) and Stevens and Cox (2008) state that all complex systems are learning systems and in order to better learn, we need to be able to better

understand the nature of the complex environments in which learning takes place. From the data it is clear that the current approach to professional learning is still inadequate. The literature considers how the complex relationship between actors, material and social and political systems within the workplace can come to impact on the learning environment as well as on the actors who carry out the work.

It seems that today, we are still failing to recognise the *act* of learning as something that occurs in situated ways, that is, as part of the act of 'doing'. While Mulcahy (2012:122) states that it is in fact 'practices that produce learning', this study has revealed that mechanisms for practitioners to transferring and applying their learning into their practice, remains hidden. It is clear from the findings that practitioners are manifestly failing to engage with the new knowledge that is being created by the academic community. The 2014 study by Cree *et al*, rather disappointingly, produced very similar findings to those from this study. While there is recognition of the organisational deficits that exist within social service organisations in England (Munro, 2011), the findings of Cree *et al* (2014) and the findings from this study, move us some way towards beginning to better understand the impediments to knowledge transfer, within Scottish children and families social work services.

Supposition 2

> *The organisational, political, cultural and social context in which child protection social work practice takes place is critical to better understanding how the barriers to effective knowledge exchange can be overcome.*

The data from this study revealed that organisational practices militate against practitioners becoming active participants in the generation and dissemination of research and other forms of knowledge. The culture of an organisation

plays a pivotal role in setting the context in which professional leaning occurs. Schein (2004) believes that organisational learning is essentially behavioural, cognitive and emotional in nature and these behaviours influence how organisations behave, think and feel. Parker and Bradley (2000) believe public sector organisations to be primarily hierarchical and reactive in nature and while they may have a strong sense of shared values there is also latent sub-cultures which can heavily influence the culture. This study suggests that there may be a tendency within social work which is anti-scientific and acts to suppress creativity and learning (Munro, 1998:25-26).

Child protection workers are practicing under considerable stress, it is therefore important that organisations are supported to consider how they can more effectively promote a culture in which professional learning can take place and knowledge can be shared. McFadden *et al* (2015:1558) found in their review of sixty-five articles that 'supervisory and peer supports are significant factors which influence commitment, organisational culture and intention to stay or leave'. The authors suggest therefore that employers should be supported to consider how the culture of their organisations and levels of management support for staff can be enhanced to mitigate against the heightened demands of the job in the current economic climate. From the data, it appears that organisations still have some work to do in to further enhance organisational cultures so that they can better support active learning and sharing of knowledge. This does not detract from the responsibilities of child protection social workers themselves, who are bound by both ethical and regulatory obligations to contribute not only to their own learning but also the learning of their colleagues (SSSC, 2003).

Despite the rhetoric about social service organisations becoming learning organisations, it is clear from this study and from the literature that there is still much to be done to actively encourage the creation, sharing and evaluation of new knowledge within social services in Scotland. In the professional context, work is often referred to as practice, and the work of Bourdieu (1979) provides

a useful viewpoint from which to inform our understanding of the concept. Bourdieu recognises both the role of the individual and the social environment in which their practice occurs. The literature review outlined Bourdieu's argument that practice and learning should be understood through three interlinked themes: field, capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979). Clearly we are still to realise the potential within the *field* to allow practitioners to properly share their knowledge and expertise. Similarly, we still do not seem to have developed ways of releasing sufficient c*apital* or resources such as networks and relationships or cultural capital such as qualifications, to properly ensure that practitioners are in the best position to take advantage of the learning opportunities that arise for them. Importantly, this study also revealed that changes still need to be made by practitioners themselves. It appears that the *habitus,* or *w*orld view of some practitioners towards their professional development reveals a lack of motivation, or commitment towards their own learning. It can be argued that *habitu*s is influenced by our social and cultural capital, but it is in my view, legitimate to expect high levels of personal engagement and motivation by regulated professionals.

Social workers themselves must actively play their part if any change is to be made to the cultures in which they are expected to work and their active engagement should be encouraged and supported by educators, employers and regulators. A helpful first step would be some clarification and minimal expectations that go beyond the current expectations of the SSSC that demand only 'every social worker registered with the Council shall, within the period of registration, complete 15 days (90 hours) of study, training, courses, seminars, reading, teaching or other activities which could reasonably be expected to advance the social worker's professional development, or contribute to the development of the profession as a whole' (SSSC, 2011). Over a three year registration period, 15 days of study or other learning activities amounts to five days per year. While stating that these activities may contribute to the development of the profession, there are no explicit requirement to contribute to the culture of social work organisations, indeed, examples relate primarily to individual activities. Teaching is the only example

that could potentially contribute to the culture and collective knowledge of social work organisations, but in reality few front line social workers would be given this opportunity. The SSSC should as a starting point consider how they might better support and encourage social workers to become more active participants in the creation of learning organisations.

Supposition 3

> *A new model of knowledge exchange is required to better understand the process of how knowledge is generated and shared in social work. Such a model would better inform the basis of policy, education and practice in child protection social work in the future.*

This supposition was not directly attended to within the assignments that were analysed. The findings in relation to this theme draw upon the literature and make informed inferences from the data, but it is acknowledged that these inferences are subjective and likely to be biased towards my own epistemological position. The literature revealed that knowledge transfer is not just about the exchange of knowledge between experts (Stringer *et al,* 2011). Constructivist approaches view knowledge transfer more as a social and collaborative process where knowledge is constructed through mutual learning and multi-stakeholders interactions. From the data it appears that students did not recognise this as something that was happening within their own organisations.

A strategy for knowledge transfer that fully recognises the capacity of practitioners and service users to inform the knowledge base and provide the evidence for effective child protection social work, must sit at the heart of all future child protection policy. Practice is not reducible to centralised policies and codified frameworks. Instead it needs to be seen as something more nuanced, evolving and situated. We need to learn how to better understand what it is that good practitioners do and better consider how we share this

within the complex field of child protection. Gray and Shubert (2013) acknowledge the expanding literature of knowledge transfer but recognise that knowledge production in itself is not enough, and that it is vital that we consider how knowledge is transferred. In the literature review, I suggested that we need to consider some of the alternative approaches to knowledge transfer that have been adopted by other professional groups.

It is not suggested that we need to find new methods for doing research, but about identifying new ways of approaching research. I argued previously that social work is being continually challenged to demonstrate its usefulness. Debates about knowledge production and transfer are now highly relevant. Social work needs to shift its perspective from thinking about research as something that is generated or produced by academics and then applied by practitioners. Knowledge transfer science encourages us to consider knowledge in a wider context, including not only academic knowledge but inter-professional and service user knowledge. This more participatory approach will result in a more democratic and egalitarian model of knowledge generation. Adopting a knowledge transfer approach would effectively shift the emphasis from the narrow interpretation of evidence-based practice models that have come to dominate the social work debate, to include practice based and service user knowledge in a more synthesised way (Alexanderson *et al,* 2009).

5.2 Implications and recommendations for research, policy and practice and teaching

The findings from the data have been considered in relation to three key areas: research, policy and practice and teaching. This chapter will consider the implications for each of these areas and make recommendations to address each. I am however aware that in some instances, the implications and recommendations that I make will apply to more than one of these domains.

5.2.1 Implications for research

In relation to the traditional research community, the challenge for us is to be mindful that our epistemological positions need to be made transparent. Engaging with practitioners and service users will undoubtedly bring challenges as well as benefits. Beresford (2000:494) outlines two forms of service user involvement in research as 'user-led, or emancipatory research and 'involvement in mainstream research'. Continuing, Beresford (2000) argues that both models need to be considered in the context of discrimination and oppression as they argue that there is a tendency for policy makers to ignore the input of service user knowledge to research if it fails to support their own view. Of course, service user involvement in research is not an all-or-nothing process. Different models of engagement exist which require different levels of involvement in the research process. These include: seeing users variably as informants, recipients, endorsers and commissioners of research, as well as full knowledge co-producers (Martin, 2010). These alternative perspectives force us to recognise the ways in which service user research can retain its honesty and avoid the twin dangers of either becoming a tokenistic exercise or being seen as a panacea for other failings (McLaughlin, 2010). Of course, this might mean that the research process takes longer as access to service users would need to be negotiated and inherent ethical issues would need to be addressed. In my experience, obtaining real or meaningful informed consent from vulnerable groups has been a challenge. Current methods of gaining consent from children are not sufficient when their agency is diminished not just because of their age, but also by other abuse related factors. While there has been some helpful work done in this regard (Christensen and Prout, 2002), I would argue that traditional methodologies also need to be revisited. We can no longer rely on traditional methodological frameworks for assuring quality and rigour of research. These new approaches also place responsibility on academic journals that must approach the ethical and methodological components of papers more critically.

The barriers outlined in this study suggest that it will be difficult to engage social work practitioners in the task of research. It is therefore important that their inclusion does not solely rely upon an invitation to participate, but must represent something more meaningful to them in the context of their professional life and practice. Organisational barriers must be recognised and more creative partnerships developed between practice organisations and their local university or education institution. The innovative project conducted by Cree, Macrae, Smith, Knowles, O'Halloran, Sharpe and Wallace (2014) demonstrated that by developing meaningful relationships, partnerships between universities and practice can be meaningful.

It is not disputed that academic research can provide a useful lens on practice and can effectively inform policy. However, issues of relevance remain at the core of the barriers as perceived by students in this research and outlined in the literature. Davies and Powell (2010: 2) provide an excellent summary of the recommendations that can be typically found in research outputs:

> "there were lots of small, rather poor quality studies, carried out in varied but largely less relevant contexts, that do not supply robust and transferable findings – and so researchers conclude that little can be said with certainty and that more research is needed."

The authors go on to suggest that policy makers and organisational leaders also find it difficult to pose research questions that can actually be addressed. Again they provide helpful examples:

> "Does competition improve quality? Do incentives work? What changes will release resource from the bottom line? How can such changes be achieved?" (Davies and Powell: 2010:2)

Davies and Powell conclude therefore that opportunities for the direct application of specific findings from social research are limited, and interactions around research can feel both disappointing and frustrating. These comments certainly reflect my own experience of engaging in research with local authorities, where the research question and method were imposed without consultation and the findings thereby limited in their validity and relevance.

New and more democratic methods of dissemination need also to be considered as academic conferences and journals are not sufficient in terms of conveying the messages from research. While the advent of 'Open Access' might be helpful, it is difficult to imagine how this might benefit people who do not have access to, or the requisite skills, to access such information? The research community will also need to consider how relevant their research is to practice and begin a dialogue with practitioners and organisations in ways that engage and sustain them. The academic research and teaching 'tribe' may find the transition from their status as 'expert' to 'co- producer' difficult on many levels, but if child protection social work is to move forward, no one source of knowledge should be privileged above any other and all stakeholders need to work together to co-create knowledge that is meaningful for those who rely on social workers to keep them safe.

5.2.2 Recommendations for research

Research impact

- All research is required to demonstrate impact. Institutions need to consider how this can be achieved in partnership with local agencies in order to enhance outcomes for vulnerable groups including children.
- Research needs to be more relevant in the local context.

Co-production with practitioners, service users and carers

- Practitioners must take more responsibility for engaging more actively with research and the research community.
- Local practitioner research forums and critical reflection workshops as outlined by Cree *et al* (2014) should be established by local universities, local agencies and service users. These would promote practice led research.

Faster turnaround of research findings

- Efforts need to be made to consider how research can be made available to practitioners in a more timely way.
- More creative methodologies need to be developed to ensure that KT is embedded into the project design

5.2.3 Implications for policy and practice

The idea that research should inform policy making and professional practice is generally viewed as constructive and supports the idea that decision making is informed by evidence. However, in reality, it is often difficult to identify the ways in which research has been used in either policy or practice (Davies and Powell, 2010). Previously Davies *et al* (2008), had argued that models of 'dissemination' or 'knowledge transfer' offer inadequate descriptions of the processes by which research and policy come together.

In relation to policy, recognition needs to be given to ways of funding knowledge transfer opportunities and for generating evidence and knowledge that is local and relevant to the local practice and policy context. Policy makers need to find new ways of engaging with the research and practice communities to ensure that attitudes that appear as defensive are not permitted to block genuine attempts to explore the relationship between practice and positive outcomes for children and families. Ways need to be found for data to be shared more effectively and local authorities and other organisations need to be encouraged not to view service users and their data as belonging exclusively to them. Undoubtedly we need to ensure data is

protected and that rigorous ethical standards are in place regarding access to vulnerable people, but these are tensions that we need to consider together, with the best interests of those who use the service at the heart of the debate. Defensive and protectionist attitudes should not be used as barriers to prevent access so that service providers could prevent what was colloquially referred to as ‘airing our dirty laundry’.

A key question for policy is of course the fit between evidence, knowledge, practice and resources. It is legitimate to ask if the concepts of evidence-based practice or indeed knowledge transfer fit within the current framework of practice in child protection. The findings from this research strongly suggest that we should question why we should continue to make claims for the importance of evidence and knowledge when there are clear barriers in place that make it difficult for organisations to utilise this knowledge. However, the implications of a workforce that is not research literate and not equipped to conceptualise the complex issues of child protection in a critical way are profound. I am concerned that we are beginning to see a culture of passive conformity to codified and prescriptive practice and wonder how it can be otherwise when practitioners cannot access or utilise alternative messages through access to literature. The lack of practitioner involvement in research, their limited opportunities for post qualifying learning in research, evidence-based techniques and approaches and their limited time to engage effectively with research, leads us to what Bellamy *et al* (2006:40) refer to as ‘ a misunderstanding of what EBP is’. I will argue that these skills are now atrophying across the profession, with only those who actively pursue academic programmes or related jobs, being able to freely explore the research and indeed to inform the research agenda.

In ’Fit for Purpose?: Post-Qualifying Social Work Education in Child Protection in Scotland’ (Kelly and Jackson, 2011) we argued that without a commitment to on-going post qualifying education at an advanced level there is a risk that child protection will become a para-profession with low paid unqualified staff. This paper highlighted the risks inherent in competency approaches to

professional learning and raised concerns about how this approach fails to adequately prepare social workers for the complex task of child protection. However, at that point in time there had been no real evaluation of alternative forms of post qualifying education and at the time we challenged ourselves and other education providers to render explicit the conceptual frameworks upon which we based our programmes. This still remains to be done.

There is still scope for collaborative partnerships to be developed that can consider the nature of child protection knowledge and skills and how we might best ensure that this knowledge is accessible and relevant and also properly reflects the social, material and political world in which practice is taking place. Internships, the use of staff secondments and improved links between organisations and the academy are good places to start. The model used in educational psychology might be appropriate where university tutors must remain in practice on a part time basis. Agencies must also better consider how they can better utilise the new skills that their staff acquire when they have completed postgraduate study or research training.

Finally, it is also important to note the responsibility that individual practitioners have for their own professional development. This study revealed that some practitioners are reluctant to undertake additional study, training or education in their own time. While organisations have a role in ensuring that their staff have the skills and knowledge that is required to do the job effectively, the SSSC makes it clear that individual social workers have a responsibility to attend to their own professional development (SSSC Code of Practice 2011: Code 1 for Employers and Code 6 for Social Services Workers).

5.2.4 Recommendations for policy and practice

Lack of funding for research

- Social work knowledge transfer bodies such as IRISS and WithScotland should consider how their strategies can better address the barriers that have been reported in this study.

Lack of resources within social work organisations to support knowledge transfer

- The Scottish Government and employers need to address the failure of social work organisations to provide access to research literature and IT resources to their staff.
- Funders must consider ring fencing resources for advanced level research skills training for key staff within all social work organisations.

5.2.5 Implications for teaching

Academics need to ensure that they draw upon high-quality evidence in their teaching and this should consider how this might impact on practice at a local level. The curriculum for qualifying social work programmes should also ensure that graduating students entering the profession are research literate. Unfortunately, there has been little research into how we can teach the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are necessary for students to be confident in their use of evidence (Strauss *et al,* 2005).

While it might be suggested that the dichotomy between practice and research is false, it has been my experience that very few social work researchers properly understand the nature of child protection social work practice or the lives of those who use these services. This mismatch in experience can result in a misplaced expectation as to what is helpful in terms of research evidence, and what is merely an academic interest; these tensions may lie at the heart of the dissatisfaction and apparent lack of effort on the part of practitioners and organisations to properly take forward the use of evidence into practice. Cree *et al* (2014) found that before any knowledge transfer project could take place between higher education and other agencies such as social service, time had to be spent in developing trusting and respectful professional relationships. By showing a willingness to becoming more involved in practice issues and contributing to practice based discussions and forums, academics would move some way towards demonstrating their respect for practitioners. Opportunities for mutual transfer and practitioner research programmes would ensure that respect and trust was able to develop across all actors.

The nature and expectations of the social services workforce is changing, yet in my experience the approach to qualifying social work education has remained relatively unchanged. The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the degree in social work and have commissioned an evaluation study that has examined the readiness of newly qualified social workers for practice (Grant, Sheridan and Webb, 2014). This evaluation has raised some interesting issues in relation to qualifying programmes where only a third of those interviewed or surveyed said that their university education had provided them with 'good' preparation, and of further concern is the 19.3% who said that their higher education institutions were poor in this regard. While these findings are worrying, it was interesting to note that when asked whether they considered themselves to be research-minded practitioners, 68% responded affirmatively - with only 15% negatively, and 17% saying they 'didn't know'. These findings show that while this study is reporting on self-evaluation by newly qualified social workers and as such does not ensure consistency in relation to assessing the quality of the data or even in terms of properly understanding the task of research, it is useful to note that this group appear to feel more confident in relation to using research than the post qualifying social workers whose data was used in this research. It can therefore be suggested that social workers begin to lose their research skills and confidence once they enter practice. Of course the reasons for this are likely to be complex, including the requirement for them to focus on developing their practice skills and knowledge, but the findings from this research indicate that the barriers identified by students are indeed working to de-skill them in relation to their research skills and literacy.

This study did not set out to consider how we could better enhance relationships between the academy and practice, but models of effective knowledge transfer exist in other disciplines such as policing and environmental agencies, and these need to be considered in relation to child protection social work research and practice. EBP is in itself not sufficient to address the barriers that practitioners are still experiencing in relation to acquiring and sharing knowledge that could enhance their practice. A new model of knowledge transfer that locates knowledge in a wider socio-material

and personal context is required in order to fully consider the impact of all forms of knowledge on the services we are delivering.

5.2.6 Recommendations for teaching

Research informed teaching

- Qualifying programmes should require high standards of research literacy across all modules and in practice settings

Teaching for practice

- Alternative models for recruiting social work academics needs to be considered. These models should consider more use of secondments and job sharing with practitioners. This model works well for other professions such as Educational Psychology.
- Social work education needs to re-consider its relationship with social science theory to ensure that social workers have an understanding of the complexity of social life and the context in which they will practice.

Qualifying and post-qualifying social work education

- Current professional learning frameworks need to consider how they address the barriers identified in this study. If practitioners do not have the skills or resources to access knowledge, current provision will remain irrelevant to practitioners.

5.3 Limits of this research

The potential limitations of the research are identified and considered below. These are summarised as follows:

A significant limitation of the study was the small sample size (n = 36). However, while the sample size may seem small, it did produce a large amount of qualitative data which have provided some useful insights. The

students in this study were postgraduate students who had time to reflect and consider the key concepts of EBP and its transferability to their field of practice. It can also be assumed that the students spent a lot of time considering their responses and have done so in context of considered engagement with the literature. The students were therefore in a position to consider the implications of the literature and theory upon their practice and were therefore uniquely positioned to provide an informed opinion free from any research or agency agenda or position.

Related to the sample, it was not possible to gather background demographic baseline data from students such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, and so forth. Also it was not possible to determine whether students worked full-time or part-time. Variables such as these generated may have produced interesting findings and generated useful insights around the relationships between these and other variables.

The study only focused on those students on the programme who were social workers. It would be useful to expand the sample to include a wider range of professionals as the task of child protection does not lie solely with social workers (Scottish Executive 2006).

Another recognised limit of this study is that the data relied on primary analysis of documents and did not include additional data that might have been gained by interviewing or surveying the students. This meant that the findings were confined to focusing only on the issues that were raised as part of an academic assignment. While interviews with students would have allowed me to follow up or clarify aspects of the students' views, I was also mindful of the demands on child protection social workers and the time that has elapsed since the assignments were completed. This would have made it difficult to recruit students for interview.

A further limitation relates to my role as a tutor and the Programme Director of the postgraduate child protection certificate. There was a risk that students would describe what they had been 'taught' and not necessarily their own experience. This risk was offset by the research design which involved in-

depth analysis of the assignments and my efforts to locate the findings within a much wider literature framework. This meant that the actual empirical data was used 'ex *post facto'*, that is, the data was analysed after a more detailed examination of the extant literature. This approach resulted in me being able to adopt a more critical and reflexive position (Cohen, 2007; Cohen *et al,* 2007). This method allows for teasing out what factors seem to be associated with a particular set of behaviours or attitudes and is a suitable method when the data and research have either emerged for different purposes or the research question has evolved over time as is the case here.

Relatedly, this study was restricted to child protection social workers who had elected to undertake a postgraduate certificate in child care and protection including a module entitled 'Critical thinking and evidence-based practice'. It would be fair to say that this sample was therefore biased towards those who were more likely to be interested in critical discussions about the nature of knowledge in their professional area of expertise. It can also be claimed that as the assignments from which the data have been drawn were written for an academic award that the students might have intentionally or unintentionally skewed their responses in order to secure a pass grade. It is my view as an examiner on this programme that the students did not consider the nature of their views to be determinants of a pass or fail. The grade was determined by the level of critical engagement with the literature and not the personal opinions expressed. It is conceded that the students are likely to have a higher level of awareness and recognition of the issues in relation to EBP than we might assume from the general workforce. This can however be viewed as beneficial. Also, as indicated in Chapter 3, the results from this study are broadly consistent with the findings of other, related studies, (Bellamy *et al,* 2006; Kitson *et.al* 1998; Rosenbaum *et al,* 2008; Scurlock-Evans and Upton, 2015).

Another potential limitation is related to my own role and background as researcher and practitioner, and the potential personal bias to influence the analysis and interpretation and therefore drawing into question the reliability and validity of the results. As previously indicated however, my methodological position makes it clear that my engagement with the research

process stems from my experience as an academic and as a social work practitioner and therefore cannot claim to be objective disconnected, or neutral in the pursuit of my research aims. I maintain that this research is therefore mediated and influenced by my identity, as both a practitioner and academic, and from my personal epistemological beliefs about the nature of the world and the nature of knowledge. As such, my identity cannot easily be decoupled from my interpretation and analysis. It is this perspective that confirms my belief that this research addresses an important area of social work child protection education and practice, and that the results are of significance and relevance to the field.

The limits above relate primarily to the limitations of the methodology and method of data collection and analysis. However, in addition to these, several other areas of weaknesses emerged over the process of writing up the findings:

This study was designed in the context of a professional doctorate and the space available (three modules) meant that it was not possible to explore in more depth how the theories that I have introduced might sit within the context of co-production. While the data has been utilised to explore a range of issues that will contribute to thinking in this field, this is an area that I will further develop as I take this research forward.

Service users were not consulted as part of this study. Any future study would need to consider what sorts of knowledge and skill service users consider it important for their social worker to possess.

Another weakness in this research is that it focuses only on the barriers that prevent child protection social workers from adopting an EBP approach to their practice. The study does not attempt to consider the factors that might facilitate the uptake of EBP as a conceptual tool for practitioners. It is likely that that the benefits of including evidence and research into practice are self-evident to many researchers. However, the findings from this study would

suggest that despite new initiatives from the SSSC and IRISS, we are still failing to properly consider how we can better integrate knowledge, research and practice and we need to consider methodologies that can better measure how social workers engage in these activities in a constructive way.
Finally, this study did not allow me to pilot my new model of knowledge transfer in child protection social work and it would be useful to have feedback about this for the future. It would also be useful to consider how the concept of co-production might further enhance my model.

Despite the limits of this research I consider that my study has utilised the data well and has considered it within the context of theories that had not been previously considered. The findings will therefore provide a useful additional lens from which to consider the context of EBP and knowledge transfer in child protection social work. The next section outlines some suggestions for future research, policy and practice and teaching.

5.4 Expansion of this study

This study could act as a useful pilot from which to further develop the findings and to test my proposed new conceptual frameworks for knowledge transfer in child protection social work. A key area for the future would be to consider how my findings and recommendations sit with the emerging literature about co-production of knowledge. This study did not interrogate this area of literature. Previously, I understood little of the concept of co-production as this body of literature has not yet become reconceptualised or re-theorised within the context of knowledge transfer or EBP. However, through further reading and discussions in supervision, it became clear that my model suggested a form of co-production and I would suggest that this could productively be explored as part of the next stage of my research.

Any future research should include follow up interviews with practitioners, and include the perspective of researchers, organisational leaders and of course those who use child protection services. It would also be useful to widen the

study to include the views of other professionals who work in child protection as much of the literature would be relevant to other professional roles such as health and police. It would be imperative for any future research to carefully consider the methodological approach in the context of both the literature and results found in this study. A creative, democratic and participatory methodology and dissemination would mitigate some way against the barriers to the generation and sharing of knowledge in child protection.

As a small scale exploratory study, this research was influenced by a range of theories including Actor Network Theory and Social Network Analysis. While these theories were not fully developed in the context of knowledge exchange, they did inform the conceptual lens from which I approached the literature and analysis of the data. The introduction of actor network theory and socio-material analysis moves us away from categorising learning as merely a list of criteria or competencies towards thinking about learning as something that is collective, situated and interactive, where knowledge can be co-constructed between actors and materials (Mulcahy, 2012; Law, 2009). Future research is required to consider in more detail how these factors properly interact with each other in the context of professional learning. As discussed in the Chapter 1 of this study, social workers have tended towards thinking about research in relation to its applicability to practice, where knowledge is generated or produced by academics and applied by practitioners if and when they feel able to do this. I argued that we need to consider the generation of knowledge in a wider context, including not only academic knowledge but inter-professional and service user knowledge. By adopting a knowledge transfer approach we would effectively shift the emphasis from the narrow interpretation of evidence-based practice models that have come to dominate the social work debate, to include practice based and service user knowledge or what Alexanderson *et al,* call a synthesis of knowledge (Alexanderson *et al,* 2009:136). I am mindful that these recommendations suggests that new knowledge needs to be co-produced in order for all stakeholders to not only feel engaged in the process, but to feel that the resultant learning is meaningful to them in either their professional lives as researchers or practitioners or in their personal lives as service users. This study does not

take the concept of co-production further at this stage, but it would be a useful concept for the next stage of the research.

5.5 Final thoughts

Finally, while there are a number of opportunities for extending this study, developing policy and practice and reforming social work education, it would be meaningless to do this without the full participation of those who are engaged in the practice of child protection and those who receive these services. Only by working together more effectively can we ever hope to close the gaps in the knowledge and experience of researchers, practitioners and policy makers. If the goal of any social work research is to make a difference in the lives of people who receive social work services, the relationships between all actors in the learning system must become more genuinely collaborative, creative and participatory and of course must then be applied. We have seen great progress being made in this regard in other professions, most notably in education where there appears to be a greater sense of joint ownership or indeed co-production in relation to how new knowledge is generated and shared. To bring about a similar level of change in social work practice and research would require a commitment from not only practitioners and researchers who I believe understand these requirements, but also from our policy makers and the organisations who deliver social work services.

Completing this study has been useful to me on many levels. Primarily, it has reinforced my commitment to a more socially and politically aware perspective on social work practice and research and a belief that for research in the area of child protection to be meaningful it must reflect the lived social and political experiences of those who use the services and those who deliver them.

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Appendices for Part 1

Appendix 1a Ethics application and approval documents for 2009 cohort

University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Standard Operating Procedures for all researchers

Constitution of the Committee

The Committee is based on the existing Psychology Ethics Committee, and comprises six members of staff from that School (from 1 October 2004: Professor Trevor Harley (Chair), Dr Ronni Greenwood, Professor Alan Kennedy, Dr Emese Nagy, Dr Astrid Schloerscheidt, Dr Roger van Gompel, and Dr Peter Willatts). The Committee comprises three additional representatives, one from the School of Education and Social Work (Dr Elaine Smith), one from the School of Nursing and Midwifery (Dr John Drummond), and one from the School of Computing (Dr Annalu Waller). The lay member is Mrs. Elizabeth Melville. The Committee reports annually to and is appointed by the University of Dundee Research Committee. The Committee operates a joint auditing process with the University of Abertay.

Remit of the Committee

The remit is to make recommendations and to provide feedback on the ethical appropriateness of research projects. *Some* aspects of design may be relevant to ethical considerations (e.g. research should not be so poorly designed as to guarantee meaningless results, thereby wasting participants' time). Note that any research involving the collection of human biological samples or data from NHS patients who are included by virtue of their being patients, or their carers, *must* be approved by the Tayside University Hospitals Trust Ethics Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC).

Note also that ethical approval may not in itself be a sufficient precondition for carrying out the research (e.g. the research might need clearance from Disclosure Scotland, or approval of local education authorities, parents, and teachers, or some other body; contact Dr Peter Willatts in the School of

Psychology, p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk, for advice); such conditions are outside the remit of the committee. You must also ensure that you carry out any necessary risk assessment, and you must abide by all appropriate safety regulations. (Contact the University Safety Officer for advice.) You are also responsible for ensuring that your research complies with the Data Protection regulations. If your data are stored in any way such that the data can be linked to an identifiable individual (e.g. by name or by code) then the data must be registered by filling out the form at http://www.dundee.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dataprotection/pro-forma.htm.

Application Procedure

All research involving collecting data from humans must be approved by the Committee before data collection commences; “research” includes experimental work, questionnaires, and face-to-face, telephone, and Internet surveys. You must read and follow the University of Dundee Code Of *Practice for Research on Human Participants*.

Research carried out by **undergraduate students and taught Masters** must have appropriate ethical approval. This approval will be dealt with by another mechanism, normally at the school or college level (details will be supplied by your college). **Academic staff, researchers and postgraduate (research) students** are responsible for producing their applications to the University Committee.

All applications for ethical approval from the UREC must be submitted to Mrs Liz Evans in the School of Psychology General Office (e.evans@dundee.ac.uk) using the attached form, *both* as a hard and an electronic copy. Incomplete applications will be returned. Note that in many cases it is possible to seek generic approval for a methodology, although any subsequent significant changes in methodology will necessitate fresh approval. Copies of sample informed consent and participant information sheet templates are also attached. An ethics application should consist of:

• The attached Ethical Approval Form, completed and signed

• The Informed Consent Form (or alternative means of establishing informed consent if written consent is not appropriate – e.g. if the participants have restricted literacy)

• The Participant Information Sheet (which must be distinct from the consent form)

• If necessary you will also need to produce a debriefing Information Sheet to give participants after the research is complete (e.g. if the research involves any sort of deception).

• Any supporting documentation required (e.g. grant applications, a copy of any questionnaire, any covering letters; see form below)

Approval

There are three routes to possible approval, depending on the responses on the form.

If any of the answers to Questions 10-12 is "Yes" then the proposal will be referred to the full Committee. Note that research involving any form of deception are particularly problematical, and a full explanation of why deceit is necessary, why there are no acceptable alternative approaches not involving deceit, and the scientific justification for deceit must be provided in a covering letter.

If any of the answers to Questions 1-9 is "No", but the researcher still considers the research to be ethically non-problematical, the researcher must write a covering letter explaining the answers and explaining why there are no ethical difficulties. The Chair may then approve the proposal by Chair's action, or may decide to refer it to the Committee.

If the answers to Questions 1-8 on the form are all "Yes" or "Not applicable", and the answers to Questions 9-11 are all "No" or "Not applicable", then the Chair of the Committee will usually approve the proposal on Chair's Action.

At least three members of the Committee (including the Chair) will read any proposal referred to the full committee. The Committee provides written comments on the application. The Chair of the Committee makes the final decision based upon the Committee's comments. The applicant is informed in writing or by email of the decision, and given any feedback. The decision is one of:

Accept without conditions

Accept with conditions

Recommend submission to another committee (e.g. Tayside NHS LREC)

Revise and resubmit (with conditions)

Reject (with reasons)

We aim to provide a decision in three weeks from submission during semester time. If the decision is *accept with conditions*, you must write to the Chair of the Committee explaining how those conditions will be met. You must notify the Chair of the Committee of any subsequent deviations from the agreed protocol. Note that the University may audit projects to ensure that ethical standards are being maintained. You should keep and file your email confirming Ethical Approval. When the research is complete you should provide a brief report noting any complaints or ethical issues that may have arisen while carrying out the research. (For taught students an electronic copy of the final project is acceptable.)

All researchers must abide by the University of Dundee's *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*, as well as the guidelines of any other relevant body; for example that of the British Psychological Society (on whose form ours is loosely based; see *The BPS Ethical Guidelines: Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research* (July 2004).

Professor Trevor Harley

Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

Checklist of common errors

These are some of the most common reasons why we have to return ethics applications for resubmission. You will improve your chances of success if you check your application against this list. Please make sure:

You have answered all questions on the form.

You have appended your Participant Information Sheet(s), Informed Consent Form, and Debriefing Form, and that these are all clearly labelled.

Any additional description or summary of the Project is clearly labelled and differentiated from the other forms.

You have run the information sheet and consent form through a spell checker.

The consent form should be separable from the information sheet so that the participants can retain the information sheet.

If you are making audio or visual recordings that you have said where the tapes will stored and how long they will be kept before they are destroyed.

If making recordings you must make clear that you will inform the participants and obtain their consent beforehand.

You have included a copy of your questionnaire, and the lead questions if you are using a structured interview.

If your study involves deception this automatically raises an ethical concern, so you should tick box B on the form. You must show how your debriefing will explain the deception.

If your experiment involves deception you must provide participants with an opportunity to withdraw their data after debriefing.

You have provided an estimate of the planned sample size.

You have specified your participant population and how you will recruit from them.

You have said where testing will happen.

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM

Title of project: Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning – a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions

Name of lead Investigator: Lynn Kelly

School: Education, Social Work and Community Education

Status: Doctoral Student and member of staff

Other Academic Staff involved: Doctoral Supervisors: Dr Divya Jindal-Snape and Dr Sharon Jackson

E-mail address: L.Y. Kelly@Dundee.ac.uk

Date: 20June 2011 UREC Ref no. (LEAVE BLANK):

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main procedures to participants in advance so that they are informed about what to expect in your study?	x		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	x		
3	Will your participants be able to read and understand the participant information sheet?	x		
4	Will you obtain written informed consent for participation?		x	
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			x
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty and for any reason?	x		
7	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	x		

8	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?		x		
9	Will you give participants a brief explanation of the purpose of the study at the end of their participation in it, and answer any questions?		x		
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?			x	
11	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If Yes, give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).			x	
12	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups? If YES please specify disability.	Children (under 18 years of age)		No to all	
		Children under 5 years of age			
		Pregnant women			
		Participants studied with respect to contraception or conception			
		People with disability (e.g. learning or communication difficulties)			

	Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory Disclosure Scotland (or equivalent) clearance.	People in custody			
		People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)			
		Non-human animals			
		Patients			
		More than 5000 participants			

Please tick either Box A or Box B below and provide any details required in support of your application. If you ticked NO to any of Q1-9 or YES to any of Q10-12 then you must tick Box B.

B. I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Ethics Committee.	Y			
Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment. Note that this description will be read by non-specialists and must be readily comprehensible by a lay person. 1. Title of project Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning – a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions 2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale This small scale study aims to try to understand how our e-learning distance learning students experience working in an e-learning environment and what the perceptions are of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to their learning and teaching. The University recognises that e-learning distance learning programmes are part of the future and have an important part to play in meeting the needs and expectations of the 21st century learner The selected students all took part in an e-learning module entitled 'critical thinking and evidence-based practice' in 2009. This module is part of the PG Cert Child Care and Protection and MSc Applied Professional Studies The academic rational for this study has been in part informed by the University of Dundee Distance Learning Policy (in draft). This document contends that a key outcome for distance learning is "that students be active learners and take responsibility for their own learning". It is therefore imperative that staff identify ways of ensuring that this key outcome is in fact happening within our e-learning distance learning programmes. This small scale study will go some way in identifying how our students perceive this form of learning Staff who facilitate learning through participative and interactive e-learning method need to consider new ways of				

engaging and motivating their students to ensure that their learning experience is at least as good of their peers who are undertaking more tradition modes of learning. It has occurred to me that we have been gathering information from our students for some time regarding their reflections on the experience of utilising the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support their learning. It now appears timely to consider these views and to try to distil from them some lessons and suggestions for our future work in this area.

3. Brief description of methods and measurements and how data will be stored

I will utilise a documentary analysis of the assignments that our students have produced. This will be compared with a further thematic analysis of the comments made by them on our VLE discussion board. This discussion board contains student's electronic submissions and reflections on a group learning project that was conducted within the VLE and includes lots of interesting feedback and reflections on the process. The data will be stored electronically and password protected.

4. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

Participants are all previous students on a post graduate programme. In total there will be about fifty documents for analysis. Students will vary in age from 22 years to 5 years although it is not possible to identify this from their written work and I will make no effort to determine this information. The gender of the group is mixed. The only inclusion criteria is that the students were members of the class during this period of study and that they contributed to the on–line discussion and presented an assignment for assessment. There are no exclusion criteria other than students selecting not to participate in the study.

5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing

Students will be contacted by letter. They will be asked if their written work and contributions to the VLE discussion board can be used by me as a source of data. The letter will include my contact details including my phone number and they will be asked to contact me within a defined period of time if they do not wish me to use their data. I believe that if I was to seek their written consent it would be unlikely that I

would get a enough of a response to make the study worthwhile. Our students work full time and are unlikely to take the time to respond to such a request but I do believe that if they have good reasons for not allowing their work to be part of the study then they would take the time to contact me. Students will be assured that I will maintain the strictest confidentiality and that their work will not be recognised in any way.

There is no need for debriefing as this will be a desktop study and does not include any contact with the student apart from seeking their consent.

6. A clear statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

I understand that there may be an objection to the fact that I am not requesting students to actively consent to being part of the study. I am only asking them to actively decline to be involved. This might be seen as compromising the notion of 'informed consent'. I do however believe that the nature of the study is not in any way threatening or risky to the student. No personal details will be revealed and as the students have all completed the programme there can be no question of bias or influence. I also believe that this study will better inform my teaching and that of my colleagues which will only enhance the learning of our future students. In participating in this module the students where all aware that their writing would be shared with the group. I do not think that any of them will have any difficulty in allowing their work to be further scrutinised if this can benefit students in the future.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project

I will start this work as soon as ethical approval is granted and the project should be completed by August 2012.

I am familiar with the University Of Dundee Code Of *Practice for Research on Human Participants*, and have discussed them with the other researchers involved in the project. I confirm that my research abides by these guidelines.

Signed Print Name

Date (Lead Investigator)			
There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of the Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not covered by the above checklist. UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006			

Appendix 1b Participant information

Dear colleague,

Invitation to take part in a study at the University of Dundee

You have completed the module entitled Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice. I am currently completing my doctoral studies and am interested in examining your essays to find out your thoughts about studying at a distance. I want to analysis the reflective account you have written about in your essays for this module. Absolutely no identifying information will be given that could identify you in any way and your permission for me to use your essays or not to use your essays will in no way impact on your studies either now or in the future.

Dr Sharon Jackson is one of my doctoral supervisors and module leader for this module and she is happy for me to do this study. I have also gained full ethical permission from the University for this Study.

Please see the participant's information sheet below as this will outline in detail what the study is about any will also address any queries you may have

May I thank you in advance for considering my request

Very best wishes

Lynn Kelly

Doctoral Student

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning – a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions

Introduction

My name is Lynn Kelly and I currently working to complete my doctoral studies. I am a lecturer in the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education. This School has a strong reputation in delivering high quality professional learning programmes. This study will contribute to our understanding of professional learning.

Invitation to take part in a research study

You are being asked to take part in a research study which is part of my doctoral studies. The purpose of the study is outlined below. I am currently working to complete my doctoral studies and am being supervised by Dr Divya Jindal Snape who will be overseeing all aspects of this work.

Purpose of the research study

The University recognises that e-learning distance learning programmes are part of the future and have an important part to play in meeting the needs and expectations of the 21st century learner. This small scale study aims to try to understand how our e-learning distance learning students experience working in an e-learning environment and what the perceptions are of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to their learning and teaching. The data selected will be obtained from the assignments submitted by students and their contributions to an on-line discussion forum.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I am requesting your permission to access your assignment for the module 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice'. I will analyse some of your discussion points that relate to your experience of collaboration within an e-learning environment. Your data will be included in my study unless you send me an email stating that you do not wish to take part in the study.

Time commitment

There is no time commitment required from students as I will be doing the analysis work myself

Termination of participation

You can decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation and without penalty, by emailing me at l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

Risks

There are no known risks for in this study.

Cost, reimbursement and compensation

There are no costs or reimbursements associated with this research

Confidentiality and anonymity

The data that I will collect contains no personal information about you or your area of work. No one will be able to link the data to your or your organisation. Data from my analysis will be stored electronically and will be password protected. This work will be published as part of my doctoral studies and may also be published in an academic journal. Student confidentiality will be maintained at all times

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are or have been a student on the PG Certificate Child Care and Protection or the MSc Applied Professional Studies and have taken the module 'Critical thinking and evidence-based practice'.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There are no disadvantages for you in allowing me to have access to your assignment

What are the benefits of taking part?

This is an opportunity to contribute to the researcher's and University's understanding of how professionals returning to post-qualifying education have experienced collaborative working in an e-learning environment

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be published as part of my doctoral studies. The findings might also be used in a publication for an academic or professional audience. You will be able to get a copy of the report from me on request. The study is predicted to be complete in the summer of 2012/3.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being funded by the university as part of my doctoral studies

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee and Dr Divya Jindal Snape who is my doctoral supervisor

What should I do now?

Please make sure that you have read and understood the Participant

Information Sheet

If you agree to your assignment for the module 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice' being included in the research, then you need do nothing.

If you do not wish to take part in the study please contact me by email at the address below before Friday 2nd September 2011.

Further information about this research study

I will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. I can be contacted on 01382 381554 or email l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

A copy of the final report will be available to you want to find out about the final results of this study by contacting me at the email address above.

The University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Dundee has reviewed and approved this research study.

Contact details

Lynn Kelly

Lecturer

School of Education, Social Work and Community Education

University of Dundee

Nethergate

Dundee

DD1 4HN

l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

Appendix 1c Consent form

Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning – a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions

Purpose of the study

The University recognises that e-learning distance learning programmes are part of the future and have an important part to play in meeting the needs and expectations of the 21st century learner. This small scale study aims to try to understand how our e-learning distance learning students experience working in an e-learning environment and what the perceptions are of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to their learning and teaching. The data selected will be obtained from the assignments submitted by students and their contributions to an on-line discussion forum.

Risks

There are no known risks in this study.

For the purpose of this research I shall be reviewing the assignment you submitted for the module entitled 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice' which was part of the Post Graduate Certificate Child Care and Protection and the MSc Applied Professional Studies in the academic year 2008/09. All date collected will be completely anonymous and no aspects of the research will reveal the name or location of the author of the assignment or discussion board material.

The participant's information sheet which is attached outlines the purpose of the research. If you **do not** wish your work to be included in this research please email me at l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk before Friday 29 July 2011 and I

will remove your data from the research. If you require further information about the research please also contact me by email before the 29th July 2011.

There is no need to do anything if you are happy for me to include aspects of your assignment and discussion board activity in the research.

Printed name of person obtaining consent: Lynn Kelly

Signature of person seeking consent:

Date:

Appendix 1d Ethical approval certificate from the University of Dundee

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School of Psychology

University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

Lynn Kelly,
Programme Director,
Child Care and Protection, Adult Care and Protection, Policing Studies,
MSc Applied Professional Studies,
University of Dundee,
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,
Nethergate,
Dundee, DD1 4HN.

5 July 2011

Dear Ms Kelly,

Application Number: UREC 11058

Title: Student perceptions and experiences of e-learning – a documentary analysis of essays and on-line discussions.

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been approved.

You submitted the following documents:

1. ethics application EBP	2. INFORMED_CONSENT EBP
3. PARTICIPANT_INFORMATION_SHEET_EBP	4. ethics application
5. PARTICIPANT_INFORMATION_SHEET_EBP (amended)	

Yours sincerely,

Peter Willatts

Digitally signed by Peter Willatts
DN: cn=Peter Willatts, o=University of Dundee, ou=School of Psychology, email=p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk, c=GB
Reason: I am the author of this document
Date: 2011.07.05 16:21:45 +01'00'

Dr Peter Willatts
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

College of Art and Social Sciences UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE Dundee DD1 4HN Scotland UK
t +44(0)1382 384622/3 f +44 (0) 1382 229993 e h.henderson@dundee.ac.uk www.dundee.ac.uk/psychology

Appendix 2a Ethics application and approval documents for 2013 cohort

University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Standard Operating Procedures for all researchers

Constitution of the Committee

The Committee is based on the existing Psychology Ethics Committee, and comprises six members of staff from that School (from 1 October 2004: Professor Trevor Harley (Chair), Dr Ronni Greenwood, Professor Alan Kennedy, Dr Emese Nagy, Dr Astrid Schloerscheidt, Dr Roger van Gompel, and Dr Peter Willatts). The Committee comprises three additional representatives, one from the School of Education and Social Work (Dr Elaine Smith), one from the School of Nursing and Midwifery (Dr John Drummond), and one from the School of Computing (Dr Annalu Waller). The lay member is Mrs. Elizabeth Melville. The Committee reports annually to and is appointed by the University of Dundee Research Committee. The Committee operates a joint auditing process with the University of Abertay.

Remit of the Committee

The remit is to make recommendations and to provide feedback on the ethical appropriateness of research projects. *Some* aspects of design may be relevant to ethical considerations (e.g. research should not be so poorly designed as to guarantee meaningless results, thereby wasting participants' time). Note that any research involving the collection of human biological samples or data from NHS patients who are included by virtue of their being patients, or their carers, *must* be approved by the Tayside University Hospitals Trust Ethics Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC).

Note also that ethical approval may not in itself be a sufficient precondition for carrying out the research (e.g. the research might need clearance from Disclosure Scotland, or approval of local education authorities, parents, and teachers, or some other body; contact Dr Peter Willatts in the School of Psychology, p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk, for advice); such conditions are outside the remit of the committee. You must also ensure that you carry out any necessary risk assessment, and you must abide by all appropriate safety regulations. (Contact the University Safety Officer for advice.) You are also responsible for ensuring that your research complies with the Data Protection regulations. If your data are stored in any way such that the data can be linked to an identifiable individual (e.g. by name or by code) then the data must be registered by filling out the form at http://www.dundee.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dataprotection/pro-forma.htm.

Application Procedure

All research involving collecting data from humans must be approved by the Committee before data collection commences; “research” includes experimental work, questionnaires, and face-to-face, telephone, and Internet surveys. You must read and follow the University of Dundee *Code of Practice for Research on* ***Human Participants*****.**

Research carried out by undergraduate students and taught Masters must have appropriate ethical approval. This approval will be dealt with by another mechanism, normally at the school or college level (details will be supplied by your college). Academic staff, researchers and postgraduate (research) students are responsible for producing their applications to the University Committee.

All applications for ethical approval from the UREC must be submitted to Mrs Liz Evans in the School of Psychology General Office (**e.evans@dundee.ac.uk**) using the attached form, *both* as a hard and an electronic copy. Incomplete applications will be returned. Note that in many cases it is possible to seek generic approval for a methodology, although any subsequent significant changes in methodology will necessitate fresh approval. Copies of sample informed consent and participant information sheet templates are also attached. An ethics application should consist of:

• The attached Ethical Approval Form, completed and signed

• The Informed Consent Form (or alternative means of establishing informed consent if written consent is not appropriate – e.g. if the participants have restricted literacy)

• The Participant Information Sheet (which must be distinct from the consent form)

• If necessary you will also need to produce a debriefing Information Sheet to give participants after the research is complete (e.g. if the research involves any sort of deception).

• Any supporting documentation required (e.g. grant applications, a copy of any questionnaire, any covering letters; see form below)

Approval

There are three routes to possible approval, depending on the responses on the form.

If any of the answers to Questions 10-12 is "Yes" then the proposal will be referred to the full Committee. Note that research involving any form of deception are particularly problematical, and a full explanation of why deceit is

necessary, why there are no acceptable alternative approaches not involving deceit, and the scientific justification for deceit must be provided in a covering letter.

If any of the answers to Questions 1-9 is "No", but the researcher still considers the research to be ethically non-problematical, the researcher must write a covering letter explaining the answers and explaining why there are no ethical difficulties. The Chair may then approve the proposal by Chair's action, or may decide to refer it to the Committee.

If the answers to Questions 1-8 on the form are all "Yes" or "Not applicable", and the answers to Questions 9-11 are all "No" or "Not applicable", then the Chair of the Committee will usually approve the proposal on Chair's Action.

At least three members of the Committee (including the Chair) will read any proposal referred to the full committee. The Committee provides written comments on the application. The Chair of the Committee makes the final decision based upon the Committee's comments. The applicant is informed in writing or by email of the decision, and given any feedback. The decision is one of:

Accept without conditions

Accept with conditions

Recommend submission to another committee (e.g. Tayside NHS LREC)

Revise and resubmit (with conditions)

Reject (with reasons)

We aim to provide a decision in three weeks from submission during semester time. If the decision is *accept with conditions*, you must write to the Chair of the Committee explaining how those conditions will be met. You must notify

the Chair of the Committee of any subsequent deviations from the agreed protocol. Note that the University may audit projects to ensure that ethical standards are being maintained. You should keep and file your email confirming Ethical Approval. When the research is complete you should provide a brief report noting any complaints or ethical issues that may have arisen while carrying out the research. (For taught students an electronic copy of the final project is acceptable.)

All researchers must abide by the University of Dundee's *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*, as well as the guidelines of any other relevant body; for example that of the British Psychological Society (on whose form ours is loosely based; see *The BPS Ethical Guidelines: Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research* (July 2004).

Professor Trevor Harley

Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

Checklist of common errors

These are some of the most common reasons why we have to return ethics applications for resubmission. You will improve your chances of success if you check your application against this list. Please make sure:

You have answered all questions on the form.

You have appended your Participant Information Sheet(s), Informed Consent Form, and Debriefing Form, and that these are all clearly labelled.

Any additional description or summary of the Project is clearly labelled and differentiated from the other forms.

You have run the information sheet and consent form through a spell checker.

The consent form should be separable from the information sheet so that the participants can retain the information sheet.

If you are making audio or visual recordings that you have said where the tapes will stored and how long they will be kept before they are destroyed.

If making recordings you must make clear that you will inform the participants and obtain their consent beforehand.

You have included a copy of your questionnaire, and the lead questions if you are using a structured interview.

If your study involves deception this automatically raises an ethical concern, so you should tick box B on the form. You must show how your debriefing will explain the deception.

If your experiment involves deception you must provide participants with an opportunity to withdraw their data after debriefing.

You have provided an estimate of the planned sample size.

You have specified your participant population and how you will recruit from them.

You have said where testing will happen.

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM

Title of project: Student perceptions and experiences implementing evidence-based practice into their practice as social workers: a documentary analysis of essays

Name of lead Investigator: Lynn Kelly

School: Education, Social Work and Community Education

Status: Doctoral Student and member of staff

Other Academic Staff involved: Doctoral Supervisors: Dr Divya Jindal-Snape and Dr Sharon Jackson

E-mail address: l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

Date: 03.04.14 UREC Ref no. (LEAVE BLANK):

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main procedures to participants in advance so that they are informed about what to expect in your study?	x		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	x		
3	Will your participants be able to read and understand the participant information sheet?	x		
4	Will you obtain written informed consent for participation?		x	
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			x
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty and for any reason?	x		
7	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	x		

8	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?		x		
9	Will you give participants a brief explanation of the purpose of the study at the end of their participation in it, and answer any questions?		x		
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?			x	
11	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If Yes, give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).			x	
12	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups?	Children (under 18 years of age)		No to all	
		Children under 5 years of age			
		Pregnant women			
	If YES please specify disability.	Participants studied with respect to contraception or conception			
		People with disability (e.g. learning or communication difficulties)			
		People in custody			

	Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory Disclosure Scotland (or equivalent) clearance.				
		People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)			
		Non-human animals			
		Patients			
		More than 5000 participants			

Please tick either Box A or Box B below and provide any details required in support of your application. If you ticked NO to any of Q1-9 or YES to any of Q10-12 then you must tick Box B.

B. I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Ethics Committee.	x

Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment. Note that this description will be read by non-specialists and must be readily comprehensible by a lay person.

1. Title of project

Student perceptions and experiences implementing evidence-based practice in the context of social work practice – a documentary analysis of essays

2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale

This small scale study aims to try to understand how our e-learning distance learning students experience the barriers and facilitating factors to implementing evidence-based practice into their work as social workers. I will be comparing two cohorts of students. The first cohort undertook the module entitled 'critical thinking and evidence-based practice' in 2009. This module is part of the PG Cert Child Care and Protection and MSc Applied Professional Studies. Ethical approval had already been obtained for this cohort. I would like to compare the experiences that this group of students discussed with the views of the current cohort, who started the module in 2014.

This small scale study will go some way in identifying how our students perceive the role and function of evidence in their practice and what facilitates or blocks them from using evidence in a routine way. This understanding will inform future teaching and learning as well as provide lessons for social work practice.

3. Brief description of methods and measurements and how data will be stored

I will utilise a documentary analysis of the assignments that our students have produced.

The data will be stored electronically and password protected.

4. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

Participants are all students on a post graduate programme. In total there will be about 6 documents for analysis. . The gender of the group is mixed. The only inclusion criteria is that the students were members of the class during this period of study and that they contributed to the on –line discussion and presented an assignment for assessment. There are no exclusion criteria other than students selecting not to participate in the study.

5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing

Students will be contacted by letter and I will meet with them during class to discuss the research. They will be asked if their written work can be used by me as a source of data. The letter will include my contact details including my phone number and they will be asked to contact me within a defined period of time if they do not wish me to use their data. I believe that if I was to seek their written consent it would be unlikely that I would get a enough of a response to make the study worthwhile. Our students work full time and are unlikely to take the time to respond to such a request but I do believe that if they have good reasons for not allowing their work to be part of the study then they would take the time to contact me. Students will be assured that I will maintain the strictest confidentiality and that their work will not be recognised in any way.

There is no need for debriefing as this will be a desktop study and does not include any contact with the student apart from seeking their consent.

6. A clear statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them

I understand that there may be an objection to the fact that I am not requesting students to actively consent to being part of the study. I am only asking them to actively decline to be involved. This might be seen as compromising the notion of ‘informed consent’. I do however believe that the nature of the study is not in any way threatening or risky to the student. No personal details will be revealed and as the students have all completed the programme there can be no question of bias or influence. I also believe that this study will better inform my teaching and that of my colleagues which will only enhance the learning of our future students. In participating in this module the students where all aware that their writing would be shared with the group. I do not think that any of them will have any

difficulty in allowing their work to be further scrutinised if this can benefit students in the future.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project

I will start this work as soon as ethical approval is granted and the project should be completed by November 2014.

I am familiar with the University of Dundee *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*, and have discussed them with the other researchers involved in the project. I confirm that my research abides by these guidelines.

Signed Print Name Date

(Lead Investigator)

There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of the Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not covered by the above checklist.

UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

Appendix 2b Participant information

Dear colleague,

Invitation to take part in a study at the University of Dundee

You have completed the module entitled Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice. I am currently completing my doctoral studies and am interested in examining your essays to find out your thoughts about how you can implement evidence-based practice into your daily practice as a social worker. Absolutely no identifying information will be given that could identify you in any way and your permission for me to use your essays or not to use your essays will in no way impact on your Dr Ann Hodson is the module leader and is happy for me to do this study. I have also gained full ethical permission from the University of Dundee to undertake this study.

Please see the participant's information sheet below as this will outline in detail what the study is about any will also address any queries you may have

May I thank you in advance for considering my request

Very best wishes

Lynn Kelly

Doctoral Student

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Student perceptions and experiences implementing evidence-based practice into their practice as social workers: a documentary analysis of essays

Introduction

My name is Lynn Kelly and I currently working to complete my doctoral studies. I am a lecturer in the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education. This School has a strong reputation in delivering high quality professional learning programmes. This study will contribute to our understanding of professional learning.

Invitation to take part in a research study

You are being asked to take part in a research study which is part of my doctoral studies. The purpose of the study is outlined below. I am currently working to complete my doctoral studies and am being supervised by Dr Divya Jindal Snape and Dr Sharon Jackson who will be overseeing all aspects of this work.

Purpose of the research study

This small scale study aims to try to understand how social work practitioners experience the implementation of evidence-based practice as part of their daily work and what the perceptions are of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to their practice. The data selected will be obtained from the assignments submitted by students.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I am requesting your permission to access your assignment for the module 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice'.

Your data will be included in my study unless you send me an email stating that you do not wish to take part in the study.

Time commitment

There is no time commitment required from students as I will be doing the analysis work myself

Termination of participation

You can decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation and without penalty, by emailing me at l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

Risks

There are no known risks for in this study.

Cost, reimbursement and compensation

There are no costs or reimbursements associated with this research

Confidentiality and anonymity

The data that I will collect contains no personal information about you or your area of work. No one will be able to link the data to your or your organisation. Data from my analysis will be stored electronically and will be password protected. This work will be published as part of my doctoral studies and may also be published in an academic journal. Student confidentiality will be maintained at all times

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are or have been a student on the PG Certificate Child Care and Protection or the MSc Applied Professional Studies and have taken the module 'Critical thinking and evidence-based practice'.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There are no disadvantages for you in allowing me to have access to your assignment

What are the benefits of taking part?

This is an opportunity to contribute to the researcher's understanding of how professionals experience the concept of evidence-based practice in their role as a social worker.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be published as part of my doctoral studies. The findings might also be used in a publication for an academic or professional audience. You will be able to get a copy of the report from me on request. The study is predicted to be completed by November 2014

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being funded by the university as part of my doctoral studies

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee and Dr Divya Jindal Snape and Dr Sharon Jackson who is my doctoral supervisor

What should I do now?

Please make sure that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

If you agree to your assignment for the module 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice' being included in the research, then you need do nothing.

If you do not wish to take part in the study please contact me by email at the address below before Friday 30th April 2014.

Further information about this research study

I will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. I can be contacted on 01382 381554 or email L.y.Kelly@dundee.ac.uk

A copy of the final report will be available to you, should you want to find out about the final results of this study, by contacting me at the email address above.

The University Research Ethics Committee of the University of Dundee has reviewed and approved this research study.

Contact details

Lynn Kelly
Lecturer
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education
University of Dundee
Nethergate
Dundee
DD1 4HN
l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk

Appendix 2c Consent form

Student perceptions and experiences implementing evidence-based practice into their practice as social workers: a documentary analysis of essays

Purpose of the study

The role of evidence-based practice in social work practice is contested. While it is recognised that evidence from research plays an important role in social work practice, it is also recognised that there are barriers to this approach. This small scale study aims to try to understand how students perceive how they have been able to implement or otherwise, evidence-based practice into their own practice.

The data selected will be obtained from the assignments submitted by students

Risks

There are no known risks in this study.

For the purpose of this research I shall be reviewing the assignment you submitted for the module entitled 'Critical Thinking and Evidence-based Practice' which was part of the Post Graduate Certificate Child Care and 2013/14. All data collected will be completely anonymous and no aspects of the research will reveal the name or location of the author of the assignment.

The participant's information sheet which is attached outlines the purpose of the research. If you **do not** wish your work to be included in this research please email me at l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk before Friday 30th April 2014, d I will

remove your data from the research. If you require further information about the research please also contact me by email before this date.

There is no need to do anything if you are happy for me to include aspects of your assignment and discussion board activity in the research.

Printed name of person obtaining consent: Lynn Kelly

Signature of person seeking consent:

Date:

Appendix 2d Ethics approval certificate from the University of Dundee

Ref: TK/GM2014/08

12th May 2014

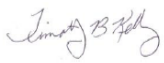
Ms Lynn Kelly
University of Dundee
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education
Dundee
DD1 4HN

Dear Lynn

UREC Application 2014-08
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE INTO THEIR PRACTICE AS SOCIAL WORKERS: A DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS OF ESSAYS

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been formally approved.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Timothy B. Kelly
Chair, ESWCE Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 3 Key for identification of participant's role

Key: Student: 32, cohort 2, female, 36-45yrs old, qualified 11-20yrs, social worker: (Student: 36, 2,F,2,2,SW)

Student number	Cohort 1 (2009) 2 (2013)	Gender	Age range 1 (25-35yrs) 2 (36-45yrs) 3 (46yrs +)	Number of years qualified(Exp) 1 (2-10yrs) 2 (11-20yrs) 3 (20yrs+)	Role Social worker (SW) Senior social worker (SSW) Manager (M) Staff development (SD)
1	1	F	1	1	SW
2	1	F	1	1	SW
3	1	M	1	1	SW
4	1	F	1	1	SW
5	1	F	2	1	SW
6	1	F	2	1	SSW
7	1	F	1	1	SW
8	1	F	1	1	SW
9	1	F	1	1	SD
10	1	F	1	1	SW
11	1	M	3	3	SW
12	1	F	1	1	SW
13	1	M	2	3	SW
14	1	M	2	2	SW
15	1	F	1	2	SW
16	1	F	2	2	SW
17	1	M	1	1	SW
18	1	F	2	1	SSW
19	1	F	1	1	SW
20	1	F	1	1	SW
21	1	F	1	2	SD
22	1	F	1	2	SW
23	1	M	1	2	SW
24	1	M	2	2	SW
25	1	F	1	2	SW
26	1	M	3	2	M
27	1	M	1	2	SW
28	1	F	1	2	SW
29	1	M	2	2	SSW
30	1	F	1	2	SW
31	2	F	1	2	SW
32	2	F	1	2	SSW
33	2	M	3	3	SSW
34	2	F	2	2	SW
35	2	F	1	2	SW
36	2	F	2	2	SW

Appendix 4 Permission from publisher to use diagram

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Feb 28, 2015

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Part 2: The Claim for Recognised Prior Learning Claim (RPL)

1. Introduction

This submission presents a Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) claim for two modules (40%) of the degree of Doctor of Education. This submission has been assessed internally as a Pass grade and feedback from the internal assessor is included at appendices 2.9 and 2.10. This submission has incorporated the feedback from the internal assessor. This claim draws on the following pieces of work:

1. MSc Applied Social Research Degree, University of Stilling. Evidence of this award is contained in Appendix 2.1 of this part of the thesis. The University of Dundee recognises this ESRC master's degree as appropriate in terms of research methods training and as equivalent to one module or 20% of the professional doctorate. Recognition of my master's degree is straightforward and is not discussed in this RPL claim.

2. Publications in peer reviewed journals. Two papers have been submitted for assessment and are discussed below. These papers have been mapped to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, at level 12, doctoral level.

2. The publications

I request that the papers presented be assessed against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework at level 12 (SCQF, 2007, Appendix 2. 2), and be considered as being equivalent to one module or 20% of the professional doctorate.

- Knowledge and Understanding (KU)
- Practice: Applied Knowledge and Understanding (P)
- Generic Cognitive Skills (G)
- Communication, ICT and Numeracy Skills (C);
- Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others (A)

I have demonstrated my competencies by mapping my contribution to these papers against the five generic characteristics at SCQF Level 12. For fluency and ease within the text, I will refer to the document numbers of my claim as outlined in the introduction. If citing specific examples, I will include the relevant page number, e.g. (p23).

In outlining my claim for RPL I will make reference to the 'characteristic general outcomes' identified for each heading. These will be referred to in abbreviated form throughout the submission, i.e. (KU1).

2.1 Paper 1

McCulloch, P. and Kelly, L. (2007), 'Working with Sex Offenders in Context: Which Way Forward?' Probation Journal, 54(1), 7-21. (Appendix 2.3)

> *The breakdown of contribution by the collaborators in the above papers is: McCulloch: 60% and Kelly: 40% (Verification of this statement is provided in Appendix 2.4)

The Probation Journal is a peer-reviewed journal.

Working with sex offenders in context: Which way forward (McCulloch & Kelly, 2007) explores the literature in relation to sex offender intervention and change programmes, paying particular attention to current and emerging theory. My contribution to this paper was generated not only through my academic interest, but also my personal practice experience as a senior social work manager with responsibility for overseeing the first community-based sex offender treatment programme in Scotland. The knowledge that I gained from this position has contributed to the development of the subject (KU 3). My ability to reflect on my previous professional practice and to consider it within the context of emerging evidence and literature has demonstrated my capacity to work in a reflective and self-critical way (A3).

What is unique about this paper is that it contextualises the theory into the contemporary climate, particularly in relation to policy and media drivers (KU1&2). The paper adopts a critical stance in relation to the ubiquitous adoption of prevention programmes that do not question the evidence base or the political and social imperatives that are likely to drive them. In this respect, the paper demonstrates my capacity to provide a critical overview of two key areas, namely the practice environment and the environment that shapes the policy. This paper provides evidence of my grasp of the principal theories of intervention and my understanding of the complex political and social environment in which policy evolves in relation to sex offender treatment programmes (P5).

My critique of the literature demonstrates my ability to synthesise complex theory and to locate my argument within the contemporary policy landscape. The unique perspective of this paper provides evidence of leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of this field (G2). In identifying the 'way forward' we identify what we highlight the tension that has developed in relationship between the cultural and political paradigm under the mandate of 'public protection' and the emerging practice direction that has developed rather hastily in the absence of any robust evidence in relation to its effectiveness (A2). Through a systematic and critical approach to the literature and data, I have demonstrated that I can integrate a range of ideas and information and come to an informed and appropriate appraisal of the issues (A1).

The Probation Journal is a peer-reviewed international journal which demonstrates my ability to communicate with peers at a standard that conforms to the level required by an academic published journal (C2), and to work autonomously while demonstrating accountability to my co-author (A1).

2.2 My contribution to this paper

While this paper was jointly written, the areas that reflect best my own contribution relate to two significant sections of the paper. Firstly, the section that relates to media interest reflects work that I had completed as part of my PhD at Stirling University and reflects my analysis of the literature and major theoretical concepts. My interest in theories relating to moral panic, stereotypes and the role of the media as a political and social agenda-setter is further reflected in the literature review that is contained in Part 2 of this thesis. The other area of the paper that particularly highlights my own particular contribution relates to the rise of cognitive behaviourism and the related critique of the literature. Also, at the time of writing this paper with my colleague, I had only recently joined the university from practice. My experience of working as a manager of both child protection and sex offender behaviour intervention allowed me to more fully explore the tensions between the role and application of theory, the media and policy within the context of direct practice.

2.3 Paper 2

Kelly, L. and Jackson, S. (2011), 'Fit for Purpose? Post-Qualifying Social Work Education in Child Protection in Scotland', *Social Work Education*, 30(5), 480-496. (Appendix 2.5)

> *The breakdown of contribution by the collaborator in the above paper is: Kelly: 50% and Jackson 50%. (Verification of this statement is provided in Appendix 2.6)

The Journal of Social Work Education is an international peer-reviewed journal.

As first author, I was responsible for my own work (A1) and demonstrated leadership and originality with my co-author in tackling this professional issue (A2). This paper principally demonstrates my work in relation to my application of knowledge and understanding, as applied to the practice of child protection

education (KU 1-3). It also addresses some of the other SCQF level 12 criteria, namely my ability to work autonomously and with accountability to others, specifically my co-author (A1).

This paper is the product of an ongoing debate and emerging understanding about the state of child protection education in Scotland. The themes emerged through my practice as an educator (P1), and through my responsibility to consider how to best design and implement a new child protection postgraduate programme. This paper demonstrates in some depth my originality and creativity in conceptualising an emerging problem, and how I have been able to practice in this context (P5 &6). This paper deals with significant ethical issues in relation to the delivery of child protection education in Scotland that have not been considered before within the context of the professional code of practice for social services (A4&5) & (G1).

This paper outlines in some depth the literature and research that relate to child protection education in Scotland and the implications for practice (KU1&2). The reviewers of the article have stated that it “addresses important issues for child protection workers, managers and educators in Scotland, and has some wider implications for the rest of the UK. Although it is Scottish-focused, comparisons are drawn with the other countries of the UK and, on the whole, the Scottish context is clearly explained.” (KU3).

This paper reviews the current state of child protection education in Scotland and makes transparent the lack of a robust evidence base for its current shape and format. On page 10 of the paper, we clearly articulate the gaps in our current provision and in particular the lack of any clear conceptual or theoretical framework for our current provision (K1&2). It is this critical engagement with this particular aspect of child protection education that makes this paper unique (P5). However, we do not leave the paper without making some informed suggestions regarding the future (page 12). We highlight that we need to begin with our own programmes and start to provide the evidence that is required to demonstrate their effectiveness (A6).

In recognition of the importance of the issues, the paper was accepted and presented to the EAPRIL 5th European Practice-Based and Practitioner Research Conference, November 24-26, 2010, Lisbon, Portugal (C1. 2, 3 & 4). I also presented this paper to the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education on 16 November 2010 (C1, 2, 3 & 4). My presentation and discussion of the paper demonstrates my ability to contribute to the creation and development of new knowledge, understanding and practices (P5). Specifically, my capacity and commitment to connecting theory, research and practice demonstrates a capacity for originality and creativity. This is supported by the comments from one of the academics who reviewed the paper (Appendix 7).

2.4 My contribution to this paper

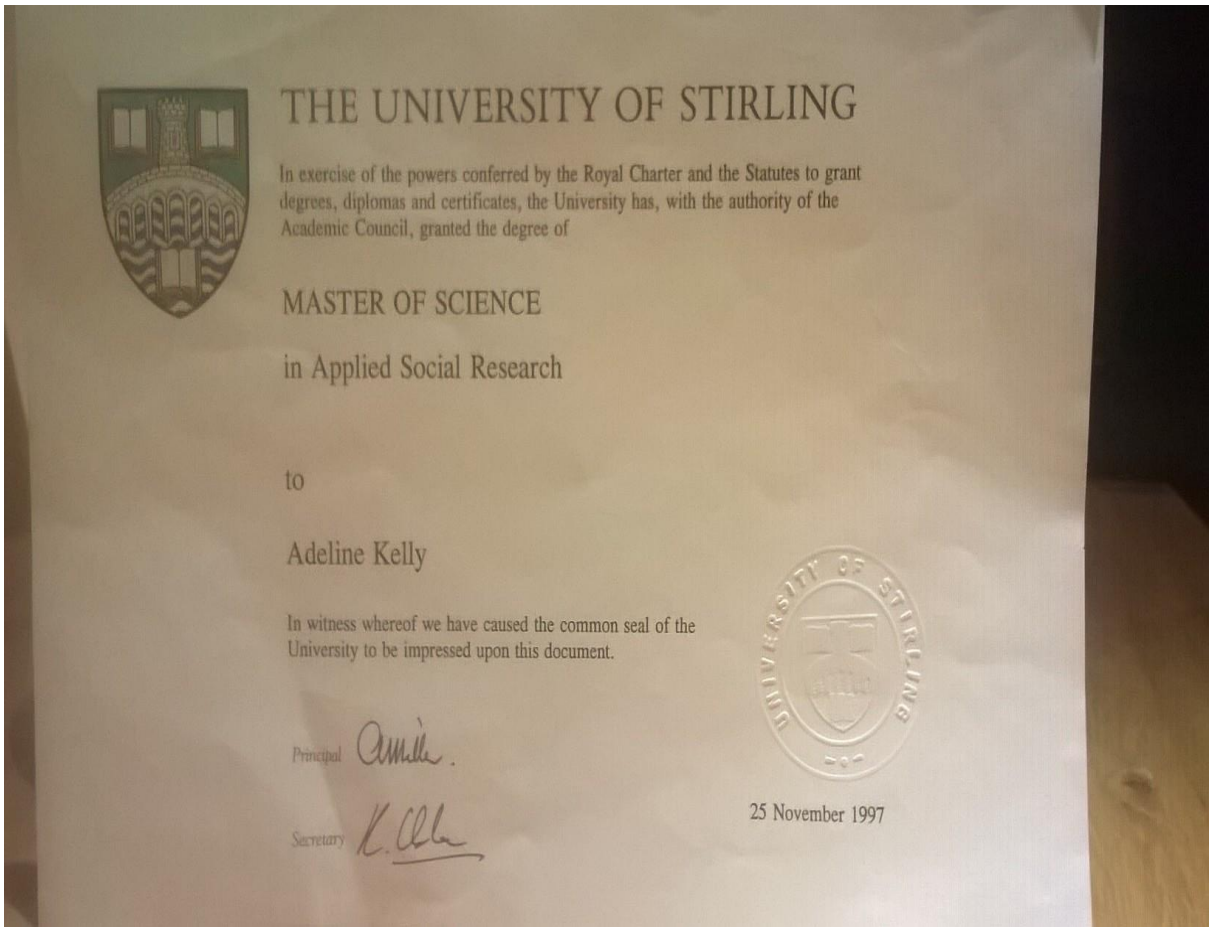
I was first author of this paper and, at the time, I was the programme director of the Postgraduate Certificate in Child Care and Protection. The conceptual argument of the paper was developed over time with my colleague and programme tutor Dr Sharon Jackson. We were both interested in the nature of child protection education in Scotland and had come to understand the task as requiring more complex and critical skills that went beyond traditional competency based approaches to education and training. My specific contributions speak to the role of regulation and post qualifying requirements and framing the policy and education context. I also contributed significantly to the review of education provision and the role of the 'key capabilities' initiative and the section 'where do we go from here' as contributing to the framing of the final concluding comments.

This paper was very much a collaborative paper in terms of the overall conceptual framework and positioning of the paper, and it reflects the experience of both writers as teachers. My specific contribution also speaks to my role as a social work manager and my concerns regarding the quality and applicability of post-qualifying educational provision that was available at the time. This perspective chimed very well with the views that my co-author had

come to share in the course of developing and delivering post-qualifying education to child protection professionals.

Appendices for Part 2

Appendix 2.1 MSc Applied Social Research Degree, University of Stirling



THE UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

In exercise of the powers conferred by the Royal Charter and the Statutes to grant degrees, diplomas and certificates, the University has, with the authority of the Academic Council, granted the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in Applied Social Research

to

Adeline Kelly

In witness whereof we have caused the common seal of the University to be impressed upon this document.

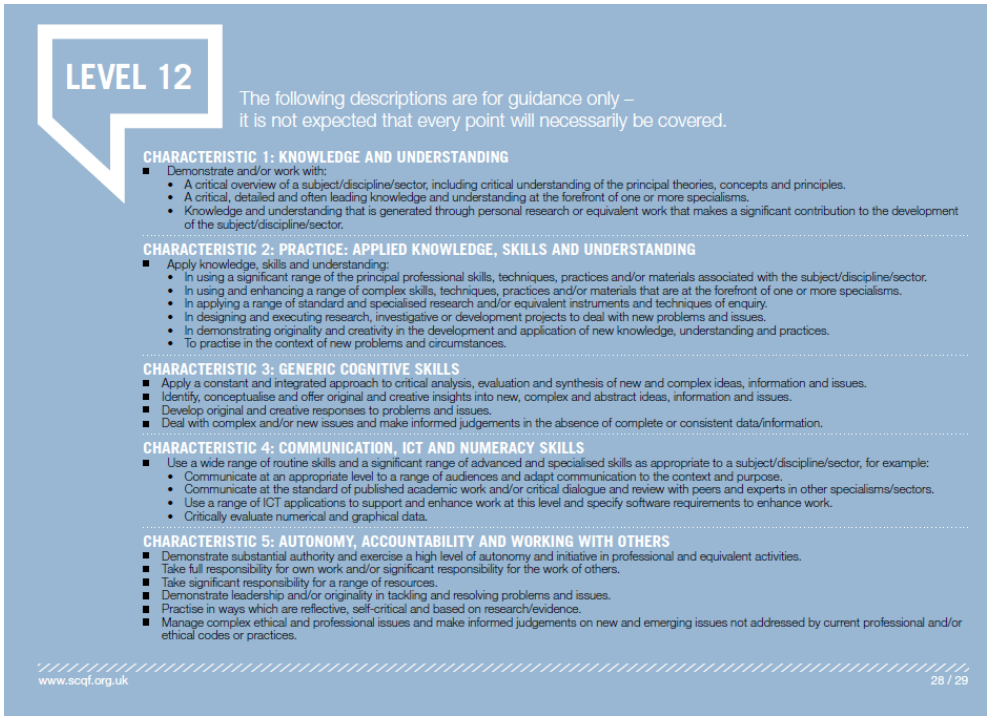
Principal

Secretary

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

25 November 1997

Appendix 2.2 SCQF Levels



LEVEL 12

The following descriptions are for guidance only –
it is not expected that every point will necessarily be covered.

CHARACTERISTIC 1: KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- Demonstrate and/or work with:
  - A critical overview of a subject/discipline/sector, including critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles.
  - A critical, detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of one or more specialisms.
  - Knowledge and understanding that is generated through personal research or equivalent work that makes a significant contribution to the development of the subject/discipline/sector.

CHARACTERISTIC 2: PRACTICE: APPLIED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING

- Apply knowledge, skills and understanding:
  - In using a significant range of the principal professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector.
  - In using and enhancing a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are at the forefront of one or more specialisms.
  - In applying a range of standard and specialised research and/or equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry.
  - In designing and executing research, investigative or development projects to deal with new problems and issues.
  - In demonstrating originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices.
  - To practise in the context of new problems and circumstances.

CHARACTERISTIC 3: GENERIC COGNITIVE SKILLS

- Apply a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues.
- Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas, information and issues.
- Develop original and creative responses to problems and issues.
- Deal with complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.

CHARACTERISTIC 4: COMMUNICATION, ICT AND NUMERACY SKILLS

- Use a wide range of routine skills and a significant range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline/sector, for example:
  - Communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences and adapt communication to the context and purpose.
  - Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue and review with peers and experts in other specialisms/sectors.
  - Use a range of ICT applications to support and enhance work at this level and specify software requirements to enhance work.
  - Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data.

CHARACTERISTIC 5: AUTONOMY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Demonstrate substantial authority and exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities.
- Take full responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others.
- Take significant responsibility for a range of resources.
- Demonstrate leadership and/or originality in tackling and resolving problems and issues.
- Practise in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence.
- Manage complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

Appendix 2.3 Published Paper 1

McCulloch, P. and Kelly, L. (2007) 'Working with Sex Offenders in Context: Which Way Forward?' *Probation Journal*, 54(1), 7-21.

Probation Journal

The Journal of Community and Criminal Justice

Article

Copyright © 2007 NAPO Vol 54(1): 7–21
DOI: 10.1177/0264550507073324
www.napo.org.uk
http://prb.sagepub.com

Working with sex offenders in context: Which way forward?

Trish McCulloch, University of Dundee

Lynn Kelly, Australian Childhood Foundation

Abstract This article explores the context and content of behaviour change interventions with sex offenders, giving attention to the contemporary climate, evolving theoretical frameworks and practice realities. Recognizing the highly charged nature of policy and practice in this area, and the potential therein for conformist and collusive practices, the article argues for the adoption of a more candid and critical approach to the development and delivery of policy and practice in this area.

Keywords culture, effectiveness, media, sex offender, sex offending

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s, Michael Sheath's insightful article: 'Confrontative Work with Sex Offenders: Legitimised Nonce Bashing?' ably called into question what had at the time become the *modus operandi* of work with sex offenders – challenge and confrontation. Now, more than a decade and a half on, this article considers how far we have come – giving due attention to the contemporary climate of behaviour change interventions with sex offenders, our theoretical understandings of 'what works?' with this group, and our practice realities. The article suggests that while academic debate may have moved on considerably – most notably, though not exclusively, within the therapeutic literatures – policy and practice developments with sex offenders have progressed more cautiously, as the two have become increasingly enmeshed in the moral, social and cultural climate which now defines this social phenomena and our responses to it. The article concludes by considering the implications of these observations for the future development of sex offender policy and practice and suggests a need to recover a level of candid criticality all too easily sidelined within the conformist and collusive cultures we increasingly find ourselves operating within.

The contemporary climate: moral panics and media solutions

> The basic interest of the human race is not in music, politics and philosophy, but in things like food and football, money and sex and crime. . . . especially crime. (Lamb, 1975, in Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994)

In most western countries sex offending has been on the social and political agenda for some years (Francis and Soothill, 2000: 56; Goddard and Saunders, 2000: 37). This political interest reflects an associated explosion of interest in sex offending by the press and the public. Among other things, this increase in interest has created a social narrative about sex offenders that has impacted on the social reality that the public, politicians and criminal justice professionals all inhabit. Gavin (2005) suggests that the dominant narrative that persists today about sex offenders encompasses notions of 'the family', female morality and of the abuser as 'a dirty old man' (Gavin, 2005: 395). Kitzinger (2004: 129) points out that while people may 'intellectually' know that 'it's not just men in dirty macs. . . . It could be anybody', most 'admit they would find it very hard to believe allegations made against anyone who was part of their own social circle'. Sensationalist reporting then, coupled with the media's tendency to only focus on high profile cases (which in many instances involve the death of a child), has had a direct impact on the moral, social and cultural climate in which academics, criminal justice and probation workers find themselves operating. This article begins by drawing on these themes to better understand the role of the printed press in relation to social change, the formation of social policy for sex offenders and the subsequent socio-political climate that criminal justice and probation workers increasingly find themselves operating within. We suggest that not only are those who work with sex offenders susceptible to media bias at a personal level, but that the public institutions and practices within which workers operate are also influenced by the media, as is evident in the social and legislative agendas being pursued currently in the UK.

Media Influence

The media, in particular the press, has long been an established element in the public and social life of the UK. As Barak (1994) argues, the press, and the media in general, has become for most of us the most significant source of information about the world outside of our immediate experience. Rawlinson (1998: 346) argues that in 'less accessible' areas of society, such as crime, media representations often become the only insight and source of information to areas of life of which only a few have first-hand knowledge, lending legitimacy to views and opinions in an environment of limited alternative or counter-prevailing options. The notion of stereotypes then is central to any study of media representations of crime and of sex offenders in particular. The term stereotype was first popularized by Lippman in his text *Public Opinion* (Lippman, 1965). Eysenck (1979) further

expanded the concept, believing that we all develop habits of thinking calle stereotyping, claiming that there have been few attempts to define the term, partl because it is often deemed to be self evident in meaning. Eysenck (1979: 2) main tains that the term has generally been used to define erroneous and unadaptive styles of thinking. Despite our desire to think of ourselves as rational beings Eysenck maintains that without stereotypes we would be unable to process the huge amounts of information we are faced with on a daily basis, having instead to think anew each time we are presented with a new problem. However, we are not all equally susceptible to stereotypes, our responses are determined by ou social, gender, cultural and class experiences (Melossi, 2000). Such findings would therefore indicate that stereotypical representations of sex offenders in particula are therefore not random and unpredictable but have developed from deeply embedded social concepts of society and social relationships.

While recognizing that notions of stereotyping can be applied to other categories of offender, it is in relation to sex offenders in particular that the media has created the image and representation of the 'sharply alien'. Cross (2005: 290) states tha the media has in fact created the powerful symbolic figure of 'the paedophile' as the quintessential 'outsider', one who has infiltrated the 'decent heart' of the community. This powerful representation of the sex offender has fashioned in the public mind the image and understanding of the sex offender as a 'beast' o 'monster', someone who is 'outside' acceptable society. This perception has in turn resulted in the 'moral panic' that has succeeded in locating the focus of ou attentions onto the external threat to society from sexual predators, rather than focusing on issues of masculinity and the treatment of women and children in ou society (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001). Recognizing the above, we contend tha media representations of sex offenders have become the primary standards by which the public and policy makers base decisions on issues of crime and justice Critcher's (2003) arguments regarding media agenda setting further reinforces this tendency by demonstrating that the issues and images that are frequently in the media become the issues and topics that the public thinks are important:

> At times of perceived crisis 'popular knowledge', voiced on the one hand by the press and on the other by community activism, becomes the more significant political force. (Critcher, 2003: 15)

In regard to the print media there is currently no requirement for newspapers to be politically impartial in the way that broadcasters are required to be. In the UK it is generally accepted that the major tabloids are clearly aligned to one o the major political parties. For example, the Scottish *Daily Record* and English *Daily Mirror* are both strongly aligned to the Labour Party (Schlesinger et al. 2001). Political allegiance in the broadsheet press is also identifiable, if less over in presentation. Arguably, these strong links between the communications networks and the decision-making machinery has led to a situation whereby a small and interconnected group of elite decision makers determine the news, political and policy outcomes for the country. As Kellas (1989: 210) observes: '. . . the links between the communications networks and the decision making machinery are close'.

While recognizing the close links between the media and politics, it is important to also note that the messages and representations emanating from the media can be confusing and at times contradictory, revealing their position in relation to the wider social structures, processes and relationships that exist in our society. Kitzinger (2004) notes the under-representation of intra-familial sexual abuse in press reporting – a tendency which she speculates may relate to the fact that the journalists or editors may view crimes of incest as less relevant or less palatable to their audience, particularly if the newspaper regards itself as a 'family' product. Goddard and Saunders (2000), in their examination of the nature of media coverage of child abuse cases in the British and Australian print media, shed further light on this phenomenon. Observing the shift in reporting, and drawing on the tools of textual analysis, Goddard and Saunders (2000: 45) observe that the seriousness of sexual abuse is often reduced to an almost consensual relationship between the child and the abusive adult, going on to describe such media phenomena as 'textual abuse', which they argue serves to 'reduce the impact of abuse on the reader'. While recognizing that media interest in sex offending has brought an improved level of visibility and openness to this social problem, the ambiguity and double standards of supporting media messages – at one extreme sex offenders are 'monsters and beasts' while at the other child victims are marginalized and, in some cases, castigated for having been targeted by these men – is problematic on a number of levels. For many victims of sexual abuse this creates a very unsafe environment for them to disclose what has happened to them, while making it very difficult for the workers tasked to respond to such claims to know what is expected of them. Such a climate can only serve to exacerbate existing problems in relation to public confidence, in an area where professional roles and responsibilities are already complex and frequently misunderstood.

Present governments, in this country and abroad, seem equally content to add to the confusion that surrounds this social problem. Previously the domain of the political right, the current Labour Government now unashamedly promotes a populist policy agenda on crime, which, in relation to sex offenders, currently constructs them as a distinct and alien group, requiring ever-increasing levels of surveillance and control. As Cathy Jamieson, the Scottish Minister for Justice, spells out:

> Sex offenders represent a small group of criminals in our communities but rightly are often the ones which generate the greatest public concern. That's why we are committed to continually looking at new ways to tighten the controls on them and minimise the risks which they pose to the public. (Jamieson, 2005).

Jamieson is seen here to be clearly linking these 'new ways' to press-generated public opinion. In England and Wales we have witnessed a similar shift in philosophy, as evident in the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) and the Management of Offenders and Sentencing Bill (2005), providing for extended sentences and post-release monitoring with proposals to extend the use of electronic monitoring and polygraph tests to sex offenders. These introductions mark a clear shift in emphasis from treatment towards 'surveillance through contact', with any notion

of therapeutic intervention being lost in the rush to produce defensive risk assessments and ever-new controls (Thomas and Tuddenham, 2002: 12).

It is within this environment of mixed messages and confused roles that practitioners find themselves working with the diversity that is sex offenders (and the risks therein). As individuals, social workers and probation workers are not immune from the stereotypes that prevail about sex offenders, nor the public's perception of the work that they do. Although supported by education and training to assist them in understanding the tensions that exist, they do so often without the benefit of ongoing critical analysis, support or debate around the interactions between their role and the shifting constructions presented to them via policy, the media and offenders themselves. Accordingly, probation agencies need to more routinely acknowledge these tensions and creatively support workers to explore the realities and tensions which frame their day-to-day practice, whilst also enabling workers to contribute to surrounding public, professional and political debate in this area with a sense of confidence and efficacy. At a broader level, policy makers, academics and practitioners must re-examine their methods of engaging with the media and the public – a process which will require us to shift our position from one that has become increasingly defensive and inward-looking to one that begins to offer alternatives to the dominant narratives, stereotypes and constructions which currently dictate.

Working with sex offenders: theoretical perspectives

It might be argued that the theoretical framework 'informing'[1] work with sex offenders is less visibly directed by the aforementioned media and socio-political forces than are the highly publicized policy and practice developments in this area. However, as will be demonstrated, closer attention to this evolving paradigm suggests a similar, if less explicit, pattern.

The probation service's relationship with sex offenders is not easily located within the dominant historical, ideological or ethical paradigms that can be seen to frame other, more longstanding, elements of the probation task. Certainly there can be no nostalgic remembering of an era in which interventions with sex offenders were governed by the service's more traditional injunctions to 'advise, assist and befriend'. Nor can there be identified a period in which the 'welfare' of the sex offender, as a legitimate end in its own right, was recognized as a primary concern. While there are of course many parallels and interjections between the two stories, for reasons already noted, the service's work with sex offenders has long negotiated an alternate path.

Wood et al. (2000) locate the emergence of sex offender treatment to the late 1930s in the United States, a period and locale in which the sex offender was represented as a 'psychopathic', 'dangerous' and 'deranged' individual. As such, the offender of the 1930s was seen to be in need of indeterminate detainment, coupled with expert administration of psychoanalytic therapy and treatment. By the 1970s faith in such approaches began to wane, in part a consequence of a number of 'less than positive' outcome studies in relation to the effectiveness of

psychoanalytic treatments, though as much influenced by shifting constructions and representations of the offender 'himself'. By 1970 the sex offender – like other offenders – was no longer deemed to be a 'sick' individual in need of cure or treatment; rather, 'he' had become a moral agent, to be held responsible for 'his' behaviour and its control. With this reconstructed identity, psychoanalytic approaches soon gave way to behavioural treatments, involving the application and teaching of fairly simplistic behavioural modification techniques. As Laws and Marshall (2003) observe, behavioural treatments rested on the construction that sexual offending was entirely sexual in motivation and no other factors were thought to encourage the expression (or repression) of this sexual desire. In consequence, fairly simplistic and limited behavioural strategies were deployed, i.e. reward and punishment, aversion therapy, electric shock therapy, shaming, etc., with each aimed at modifying, and ideally eliminating, deviant behaviours and fantasies.

The rise of cognitive-behaviouralism

Later forms of behavioural therapy grew to include social skills training, the enhancement of self-esteem and substance abuse management, reflecting an emerging awareness of the wider processes impacting on sexual behaviour and deviance. Inevitably, as theoretical understanding of the nature of, and motivations for, sexual offending grew more complex – coupled with the emergence of studies which, once again, questioned the effectiveness of sex offender treatments to date – behavioural treatment gave way to the current correction of choice: cognitive-behavioural treatment. Given the academic criticism that now surrounds cognitive behavioural treatments, it is worth noting that at the point of its adoption in the early 1980s, cognitive behavioural treatments were celebrated for their more 'comprehensive' attention to the 'broad range' of issues thought to underpin (sexual) offending and decision making (Brown, 2005; Marshall and Laws, 2003; Sheldon, 1995). As Brown summarizes:

> . . . the cognitive behavioural approach developed from an integration of behavioural and cognitive traditions to stress the complexity of the relationships between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and the interplay between the individual and the environment. (Brown, 2005: 34)

Despite the breadth of its theoretical underpinnings, the development and application of cognitive-behaviouralism with sex offenders in the UK has been far more narrow in its application than was initially conceived – in no small part a consequence of the notable convergence at this point between theoretical developments and the increasingly pervasive influence of politics and the media on the policy and practice of penality. To summarize, the adoption of cognitive behaviouralism within sex offender treatment coincided with the emergence of a new socio-political climate in which the need to identify and more publicly articulate 'what works' with offenders became central to the government's project of reform for this area of public services. Specifically, the emergence and emphasis in the 1980s on 'punishment in the community', with its media-fuelled narratives of risk, uncertainty

and danger (Sparrow et al., 2002) – coupled with government's broader modernizing project to secure the subjugation and regulation of what were increasingly deemed to be semi-autonomous, inefficient and, 'not to be trusted' public agencies – heralded in a new era of centralized control and bureaucratic governance. Central to this new climate of control was a renewed, and as others have noted, 'near evangelical' (Mair, 1997), belief in the efficacy of correctional interventions and, more specifically, in cognitive behavioural interventions as the effective means of correction. The story from then to now is well documented; cognitive behavioural group work programmes are now the correction of choice in interventions with sex offenders and are commonplace in both prison and community settings across the UK (Mandeville-Norden and Beech, 2004; Whyte, 2002).

Typically, cognitive behavioural interventions with sex offenders in the UK have been principally concerned with challenging and changing cognitive distortions – or, as Vivian-Byrne (2004) puts it, 'changing people's minds'. Interventions are routinely and unapologetically focused on the individual offender (now 'risk subject'), on the offence behaviour and on the modification of the thoughts, attitudes, and reasoning processes thought to underpin that behaviour (Hollin, 2001: 21). Driven by an apparent rationale of evidence-based practice and an attendant concern to standardize the approach and delivery of core interventions and programmes, such developments have been notably streamlined and have been seen by many as representing a 'significant step forward in this area, particularly when considering the comparative lack of structured or standardised treatment that was previously available' (Mandeville-Norden and Beech, 2004: 210). As Sheath (1990) observes, in a climate where the repellent nature of sex offending (and, increasingly, sex offenders) is accepted by all, the attractions of an overtly confrontational approach are manifold, easily explaining why the cognitive behavioural approach gained almost instant popularity amongst politicians and practitioners alike (Sheath, 1990: 159). However, while cognitive behaviouralism remains the dominant and even celebrated theoretical paradigm in our story so far, it is not without its limitations or critiques. For example, Sheath (1990) acknowledges the tendency of such an approach to become a professional and legitimized form of 'nonce bashing'; while Vivian-Byrne (2004) highlights both the ethical and effectiveness dilemmas inherent in an approach orientated towards the goal of 'changing people's minds'. Moreover, recent evaluations of cognitive behavioural sex offender programmes in the UK have produced, at best, equivocal results in relation to recidivism outcomes (see for example, Beech et al., 1998; Friendship et al., 2003), legitimizing a renewed attention to the broader processes which may be required to support change in this area.

Looking beyond cognitive-behaviouralism

Amongst other things, the above messages have contributed to the emergence of what might be termed a complimentary discourse in sex offender interventions, now widely known as the 'who works' literature. Drawing predominantly on the psychotherapeutic literatures, the 'who works' literature points to the importance

of staff characteristics or 'process issues' in the delivery of effective programmes. More specifically, a number of studies now indicate that the 'therapist's' style, the client's perception of the therapist, and the 'alliance between the client and the therapist' are all important indicators of treatment effectiveness (Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Marshall et al., 2003). Broadly, the emergence of the 'who works' discourse has been welcomed by both academics and practitioners alike, in so far as it has been seen to complement existing knowledge in this area. However, much like application of cognitive behavioural approaches, to date the application and implications of the 'who works' discourse for sex offender interventions have been rather narrowly conceived. For example, much of the discussion in this area fails to look beyond the group context or programme (far less the actual content of programmes), effectively reducing the 'who works' findings to a shiny new tool for the effective group worker. As Mann concludes in discussing the implications of the recent focus on 'process issues': 'in order for the [group] programme to be maximally effective, the facilitators of the programme must be able to deliver the content in a particular style . . . training programmes for sex offender therapists are starting to take this issue into account' (Mann, 2004: 148). Similarly, almost no attention has been given to the implications of these findings for effective assessment with sex offenders – a process which continues to be overlooked in the race to allocate offenders, or 'risk subjects', to core programmes. Further, very little attention has been given to the potential tensions inherent in a practice development which seeks to combine core therapeutic variables, such as 'empathy', 'genuineness', 'warmth' and 'respect', with more confrontational and manipulative modes of engagement which continue to be legitimized within this highly charged area of practice. In this respect it might be argued that recent theoretical developments in this area have been somewhat hijacked, or at least re-appropriated, by the increasingly rigid political and practice paradigms currently regulating sex offender interventions (i.e. groupwork, managerialism, correctionalism and control) – a process which is almost certainly underpinned by the media-led constructions, conceptions and moral panics already highlighted.

Notwithstanding the above, amidst these mainstream developments there has also emerged what might be termed more radical voices in the development of sex offender treatment and intervention – no doubt in part informed by a cognisance of the above-noted limitations, tensions and contradictions. Central to these voices is a willingness to deconstruct rather than augment some of the perceived givens of sex offender treatment – or, to put it more simply, to get 'beyond' cognitive behavioural approaches and the *modus operandi* by which such approaches have come to be realized. One of the earliest voices of dissonance in this respect emerged from practitioners – most notably in the form of the now well-recognized article by Michael Sheath (1990), entitled: 'Confrontative Work with Sex Offenders: Legitimised Nonce Bashing?'. Though Sheath's target is not cognitive behaviouralism per se, his article ably questions and deconstructs what had, at the time, become some of the fundamental assumptions and practices framing the probation service's work with this group – much of which Sheath argued was 'ill-conceived, punitive and counter productive'. Writing over a decade and a half ago, Sheath notes:

> Much of the work currently being undertaken by probation officers in this field appears to rely upon the use of structured confrontational interviews where sex offenders are required to give an account of their offending and to have that account challenged as to its veracity. Elements of victim blaming, distorted thinking, denial and the minimising of responsibility are identified, confronted and, ultimately, changed. (Sheath, 1990: 159)

Sheath goes on to propose an 'alternative approach', characterized by respect, space, acceptance (of the offender not the offence) and a concern to understand the unique experience and beliefs of the individual offender. It is worth pausing to consider how far we have come since Sheath's article. While there is certainly anecdotal evidence to indicate the integration of Sheath's approach in recent practice developments – i.e. the emergence and integration of the 'who works' discourse (Mann, 2004), the rise of re-integrative approaches (McAlinden, 2005, 2006), and the use of alternative or 'complimentary' interventions (Allan et al., 1997) – these developments are by no means commonplace and thus provide little evidence of significant or widespread change.[2]

Vivian-Byrne's work (2002, 2004) is more direct in its questioning and deconstruction of contemporary frameworks, in so far as she calls into question the fundamental assumptions which characterize and underpin the cognitive behavioural enterprise – not least the belief that we can change people's minds. Starting from this position of scepticism, Vivian-Byrne (2004) proposes a number of alternative (albeit long-standing) practice models, including personal construct theory, systemic approaches ('first' and 'second order') post-modern approaches and social constructivist models – each of which she acknowledges may or may not be effective with sex offenders. In a similar vein, other recent commentators have considered the applicability of restorative justice approaches (McAlinden, 2005), strengths-based approaches or the 'good lives' model (Ward and Marshall, 2004). Though disparate, common to each of the above models is a willingness to reconsider or deconstruct some of the dominant assumptions and prescriptions of 'effective' sex offender treatment – a process that Vivian-Byrne (2004) argues is crucial to our ability to innovate in this area. In particular, each of the above practice models challenge prescribed notions of 'treatment' of the offender, the offending act, and the context in which that act takes place. In doing so, each model offers alternative and more constructive terms of engagement and intervention. For example, personal construct theory – similar to Sheath's (1990) argument – challenges workers to understand the offender as a unique individual and to see the world from his or her perspective. Where cognitive behavioural approaches identify the client's cognitions as distorted and unacceptable, personal construct theory starts from the position that the client's beliefs are not necessarily 'wrong' but different, and perhaps even understandable given their history. The good lives model proposes a more holistic and constructive way of conceptualizing and engaging with offenders, focusing less on individual offender deficits and more on the personal, inter-personal and social contexts required to enable offenders to live and sustain 'a good life'. Equally pertinent in the current moral and socio-political climate are the ideas explored within 'second order' systemic practice

approaches – an approach that recognizes the therapist or worker as part of the system that he or she is trying to change. In recognizing the subjective beliefs, experiences, values and prejudices which workers inevitably bring to the change process, second order systemic approaches support a more tentative and 'non-expert' approach to intervention, in which the task of the worker is to develop the effective partnership or alliance needed to identify, support and sustain a viable change process.

Each of these approaches supports a return to more therapeutic or 'social work' type interventions which, in the broader realms of penal research, and to a lesser extent policy and practice, are currently experiencing something of a revival (see for example Burnett and McNeill, 2005). However, in the arena of sex offender intervention, such approaches remain very much on the margins, not least because they challenge some of the most fundamental constructions currently being generated in relation to the 'why', 'what' and 'how' of sex offending and its control. While our preference may be to dismiss such approaches as inappropriate, tangential, lacking in empirical evidence, or simply too socially 'challenging', in a context where our knowledge and understanding of how sex offenders can be helped to desist from offending remains very much in its infancy, the rationale for giving due attention to these more complex and controversial constructions needs to be stated.

Which way forward? The development of sex offender policy and practice

The previous discussion brings us to something of a crossroads when considering the future direction and development of sex offender policy and practice. On the one hand, a very dominant cultural and political paradigm can be identified which, under the mandate of public protection, is currently driving through a raft of new, and largely exclusionary, policies, procedures and technologies – each of which nobly, though perhaps naively in the absence of any rigorous supporting research evidence (see for example, Thomas, 2004; Thomas and Tuddenham, 2002), promise improved protection, security and safety for children, adults and the community at large. On the other hand there can be identified an emerging theoretical and practice climate in which, at least for some, the limitations of our current knowledge, interventions and core conceptions in relation to work with sex offenders are becoming not only apparent but professionally untenable.

This tension is of course to be expected. While academic debate may have moved on considerably in this area, most notably in the criminological and therapeutic literatures, the social, cultural and political climate informing policy and practice developments has 'progressed' more cautiously. Indeed, as Hudson (1998) observes, it would appear to be the very erosion in recent years of a more 'progressive' political and social climate (at least in so far as it can be extended to all members of society) which now presents the greatest obstacle to the development of more re-integrative or restorative approaches in this area:

> . . . the recovery of a culture of social inclusion which would underpin and support the development of processes whose outcome is shaming that is re-integrative rather than eliminative, and where the outcome is the enhancement of social justice . . . is the most intractable problem in the path of restorative justice, and it is one that is beyond the ability of proponents of any theory of penal reform to solve. (Hudson, 1998: 256)

In addition to this, there is a need to acknowledge our individual and collective reluctance to move away from 'punishment' as the binding paradigm for our work with sex offenders; our natural concerns around the risk of minimizing the responsibility of the perpetrator; the absence of substantial research evidence which might assuage and assure us that re-integrative approaches can have a notable influence on sexual recidivism; and the longitudinal problems of developing and resourcing alternative approaches. In this context it is hardly surprising that mainstream 'developments' in this area have been constrained to the creation of new and improved control technologies, with only marginal developments evident within the increasingly standardized and disaggregated processes of engagement and intervention.

While this direction may be understandable in a social, political and practice climate where 'risk' and 'anxiety' have become our watchwords and 'divide and rule' our response, we do ourselves and our service users no favours if we fail to grapple with the growing tensions and contradictions of our current approach, not to mention the self-imposed limitations (with regard to outcomes and effectiveness) associated with that. For the time being, the probation service and criminal justice social work services in Scotland, have been tasked to contribute to public protection and the promotion of community safety via the reduction of re-offending – an outcome which research evidence indicates is unlikely to be achieved by the routine ministrations of punitive, exclusionary or managerial methods alone (if at all). Mindful of this remit, and the context in which that is being taken forward, this article concludes by identifying three core tasks which would appear to be essential to the service's ability to progress its role beyond public and political appeasement, towards the possibility of supporting meaningful change in the interests of all.

Principally, there appears to be a need for the service, and its personnel, to critically revisit its role and task in its endeavours with sex offenders. Mainstream developments in the area of sex offender policy and practice might legitimately lead one to question whether the probation service continues to have a role beyond the 'management' and 'monitoring' of convicted sex offenders. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that some, if not many, have jettisoned any hope of reintegrating sex offenders back into society. While these issues require frank and informed debate, any analysis of the service's future role must be considered within the context of its present remit – a remit which, at least for now, encompasses an explicit commitment to reducing the unnecessary use of custody and promoting the social inclusion and rehabilitation of the offender (McNeill et al., 2005; Scotland, 2005). Second, and in accordance with even the most basic principles

of programme integrity, any consideration of the service's present and future task must involve critical consideration of whether the methods, approaches and resources currently employed to achieve this task have any chance whatsoever of succeeding. This issue is as pertinent to strategic planning or programme design as it is to the intricacies of day-to-day practice. In a climate where what we say we do has become almost as important as what we do, there would appear to be a growing pressure upon practitioners to overlook at times the considerable gap between prescribed and often non-negotiable 'case' goals (i.e. wholesale behaviour change void of ambivalence or lapse) and the all-too-often meagre methods and resources at our disposal to support these goals. As Thomas and Tuddenham (2002) observe, the development of restrictive and even exclusionary measures can always be justified as defensible on the grounds of protecting children, and this has to remain a key priority for statutory agencies that work with vulnerable people. However, the more pressing dilemma for today's probation personnel tasked to support change at the individual level, is how can that change be effected? Despite the comparative lack of research attention given to the effectiveness and outcomes of current interventions with sex offenders, the limitations of cognitive behavioural interventions with this group are now well documented. Moreover, there exists a growing (albeit muted) body of research which suggests that punitive, exclusionary and strictly 'offence focused' approaches, far from reducing sexual recidivism, may in fact increase the risk of re-offending (Hudson, 1998; McAlinden, 2005; Thomas and Tuddenham, 2002). This article has highlighted a few alternative approaches which are now (re-)emerging and which at least appear promising in this area – in so far as they seek to engage with offenders as holistic individuals, recognizing that the motivations and behaviours of this diverse group are likely to be affected by a similarly diverse range of factors as those that motivate and moderate other social behaviours. While we are right to be cautious in the development or adoption of approaches where there exists limited research evidence with regard to their effectiveness in reducing sexual offending, as McAlinden (2005) acknowledges, in the absence of any workable alternative, there is surely both a need and opportunity here for 'careful experiment' (McAlinden, 2005: 388).

Finally, there is a need to reassess ourselves. As those charged with the task of working with what is invariably described as the 'most difficult of societal problems' there is a continued need to reflect on and question the multiple and competing messages, values and truths governing not only our practice but our individual thoughts, attitudes and behaviours in this area. This is a challenge for any individual operating in the current confines of a 'get tough' penal climate, though it is perhaps most pronounced in an area in which these pressures extend far beyond the vocabulary used to present the service. The emergence of increasingly managerialist, restrictive and exclusionary government directives in this area, coupled with the challenge of implementing such directives in the context of a media-generated moral panic – now masquerading as a moral and social consensus on the subject – has made it significantly more difficult for those practising in this area to engage in even the most basic processes associated with what Vivian-Byrne (2004) describes as 'second order' systemic practice, far less take

on the task of challenging that 'consensus' from the inside out. Yet, this remains the challenge facing today's practitioners, not least because the alternative is too bleak to consider, far less to accept.

Notes

1 This term is used loosely, recognizing that the extent to which theoretical perspectives currently inform sex offender policy and practice is a subject for debate.
2 It needs to be acknowledged that the lack of evidence cited is in part a reflection of the dearth of literature in this area – most notably that which seeks to illuminate contemporary practice realities by attending to practitioner and/or offender perspectives. Anecdotally, the experience and observations of the authors would suggest that individual practice and approach in this respect is 'diverse' – varying considerably both between agencies and indeed within them. The need to augment this discussion with practice-led research is clear.

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Appendix 2.4 Verification of authorship for paper 1

Confirmation of authorship of journal article:

McCulloch, P. and Kelly, L. (2007) 'Working with Sex Offenders in Context: Which Way Forward?', *Probation Journal*, 54(1), 7-21.

I can confirm that Lynn Kelly was co-author of the above paper. Lynn contributed 40% of the work for this paper.

Signed

Patricia McCulloch

Appendix 2.5 Published Paper 2

Kelly, L. and Jackson, S. (2011) 'Fit for Purpose? Post-Qualifying Social Work Education in Child Protection in Scotland', *Social Work Education*, 30(5), 480-496.

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Fit for Purpose? Post-Qualifying Social Work Education in Child Protection in Scotland

Lynn Kelly & Sharon Jackson

Recommendations for post-qualifying training and education in child protection social work consistently form part of the political response to child abuse scandals. The influence of child abuse politics upon the push towards post-qualifying training and education has been consistent across the United Kingdom. Within Scotland educators have been quick to respond to the market demand for programme provision and there is now a growing number of academic programmes being offered by higher education institutions. Yet despite post-qualifying training and education achieving the status of 'panacea' there is little in the way of a national dialogue about what post-qualifying training and education in social work child protection should look like. The parameters of this have not been subject to any kind of national debate and the Scottish academic community has not entered into a professional dialogue on these issues. More crucially, educators have not engaged in any level of identifiable evaluation of their provision and there is an absence of engagement with the scholarship of teaching child protection at the post-qualifying level. This paper connects with these issues to question whether the post-qualifying training and education delivered by Scotland's universities can be considered fit for purpose.

Keywords: Post-Qualifying; Training; Education; Child Protection; Social Work; Scotland; Evidence Base; Teaching

Introduction

Within Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom the history of specialist training and education for child protection social workers[1] is complex and turbulent

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(Cooper and Rixon, 2001; Postle *et al.*, 2002; Galpin, 2009). It has evolved within the context of continued public, political and professional concern that the child welfare system does not always respond adequately or effectively to the needs of some children (Devaney, 2009). As a consequence, developments in policy, procedure and practice have evolved within a milieu of a belligerent and unrelenting mass media pillorying of professional practice (Masson, 2006; Devaney, 2009) which has been characterised by sensationalised reporting of cases of serious child abuse, neglect and child death tragedies. This has been seen most recently in relation to the inquiry into the death of Baby Peter in England and Brandon Muir in Scotland wherein post-qualifying (PQ) training and education has, yet again, been identified as part of the solution to equip social workers (and other professionals) to work with complex cases where a greater level of knowledge, skill and expertise is considered to be needed. Here, the influence of the mass media construction of child protection social work practitioners as incompetent, if not dangerous, cannot be underestimated. Three decades of child abuse inquiries have witnessed vitriolic attacks on the profession. Critical damage has been done to the credibility, legitimacy and status of the profession and public confidence in social work's claim to expertise in this area has been seriously eroded (Dominelli, 1997).

Within Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, several decades of child abuse scandals have placed child protection services under severe strain. Whilst European welfare services have not been immune to these influences, within the United Kingdom, the frequency and intensity of the media reporting of these scandals has been considerably magnified by comparison. In part, this differential media and public response to child protection social work may be due to the fact that in Europe child protection is not considered as the sole domain of social work (Lorenz, 1994). Although child protection is very much considered as an inter-professional area of practice within the United Kingdom, state social work is still considered to have the lead role in the delivery of child protection services. In discussing these issues in relation to England and Wales, Ayre (2001) considers that the adversarial nature of child protection processes with England and Wales *vis-à-vis* other European countries such as France, has heightened public criticism and media vitriol. Here, Ayre (2001) highlights that the rigid legislative system that structures the parameters of state/social work intervention in the private lives of children and families has led to child protection processes that are characterised by conflict between professionals and families rather than co-operation (which characterises these relationships in France). Ayre (2001) indicates that this has been an unintended consequence of the legislative framework within England and Wales which, driven by a libertarian political tradition, was aimed at the prevention of unwarranted state intrusion into the private lives of families.

Of course, the task of child protection brings into focus the tensions between the social control and the humanitarian aspects of the social work task, tensions which pervade all welfare systems (Lorenz, 1994). Within the United Kingdom state social work in child protection has had to walk a tightrope between intervening too much or too little. Thus it has either been pilloried for intervening too much or too little whilst

simultaneously being criticised as being either too weak or too heavy handed. As a consequence, public confidence and trust in child protection professionals and social workers in particular is extremely low (Ayre, 2001).

Recommendations for training and education to remedy practice deficiencies have consistently formed a major part of the political response to these conditions. The influence of child death and inquiry politics upon the push for specialist training and education for social workers who practise in the field of child protection has been consistent across the UK, as have the recommendations stemming from the system investigations they have incited. For instance, within Scotland the inquiry into the death of Kennedy McFarlane (Hammond, 2001) prompted a national audit and review of child protection processes which identified that a lack of suitably experienced, qualified, competent and trained staff required resolution and recommended that:

> The Scottish Executive in partnership with the regulatory bodies should consult on the minimum standards of professional knowledge and competence required of practitioners who undertake investigations, assessments and clinical diagnosis when working with children and their families. In particular it should establish the minimum necessary qualifications and experience required of those making decisions that fundamentally affect the future wellbeing of children. (Recommendation 16, Scottish Executive, 2002, pp. 18 and 163)

Within Scotland this recommendation clearly identified the necessity of specialist training and education and the need to define the parameters of this.

In such ways specialised training and education has continuously emerged as a key solution to the improvement of child protection services (Reder and Duncan, 2004). PQ awards in the protection of children are now well entrenched within the continuing professional development (CPD) agenda for qualified social workers in both Scotland and the rest of the UK and are, as Brown *et al.* (2008, p. 853) point out in relation to PQ social work awards more generally, 'considered to be evidence of *continued and enhanced* competence to practice'. In part, they also reflect an increasing trend towards and debate around specialised practice, the rejection of genericism (Stevenson, 2005; Community Care, 2007), and 'service specific competence' (Skinner and Whyte, 2004, p. 372). Generally speaking, there appears to be a consensus view that this area of social work requires specialised empirical and theoretical knowledge to underpin practice *and* the enhancement of routine competencies and procedural knowledge that goes beyond that offered in generic qualifying programmes.

These drivers, alongside similar recommendations arising from the performance inspection of social work child protection services and the need for practitioners to continuously update their skills and procedural knowledge to practise in an environment that is characterised by relentless 'organisational turbulence' (Stevenson, 2005, p. 625) stemming from the unerring stream of obligatory guidance, policy and procedures issued by the state (Howe, 1992), has rendered PQ training and education an immutable object of debate. Indeed, the focus on PQ training and education has never been greater across the social care sector, with recent years having seen a flurry of activity within workforce planning and development agendas and the continued

recasting and articulation of a national vision in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, this vision is most explicitly expressed within several key national documents: *Improving Front Line Services: A Framework for Supporting Frontline Staff* (Association of Directors of Social Work/Scottish Executive, 2005); *Continuing Professional Development for the Social Services Workforce* (Scottish Social Services Council, 2004) and *The Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services* (Scottish Social Services Council/Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, 2008).

Workforce Development

There is little doubt that PQ training and education in the protection of children is firmly on the agenda and has been for some time. Yet, within Scotland we appear to be peculiarly quiet on what exactly PQ training and education in child protection should look like. The rhetoric surrounding this within Scotland has not been translated into an implementable framework for training and education, and perennial questions that address issues of curricula development, design, delivery, pedagogy and the appropriate level or levels of training/education that should be provided are not being asked. Within Scotland none of this has been subject to any obvious or sustained kind of conceptual or empirical inquiry. The need to do so, however, has been previously recognised within national Scottish policy developments. Following the national audit and review of child protection, there was a plan to develop a national training framework as part of the work undertaken within the three-year child protection reform programme which was rolled out to take forward some of the recommendations of the audit and review. However, the strategic training subgroup, which was reported within the review of the child protection reform programme to have developed a framework for training (Daniel *et al.*, 2007), has not concluded this strand of work at this time. As a consequence, clarity about the desired nature of specialised training and education at the PQ level has not been achieved. Key policy documents (such as those mentioned above) communicate a generalist vision within non-specific advice and frameworks for CPD and continuous learning within a common framework across all levels, roles and specialisms within the social services workforce. The context is also confused by the disparate nature of qualifications and courses and a mixed economy of provision which ranges from in-house training delivered by different agencies across all sectors to higher degrees offered by universities. Therefore, despite the desired articulations of the key national documents driving the agenda there is no clarity within them about the purpose, direction or content of training and education in this area of practice. Nowhere in these documents is there a single attempt to define the parameters of this.

Interestingly, the Scottish Social Services Council, which has lead responsibility in Scotland for promoting and developing education and training for the social services workforce in Scotland, appears somewhat silent on this issue.[2] Indeed, within Scotland the role of the higher education sector in the provision of PQ training and education in this area is unclear to say the least. This contrasts with England, Wales and Northern

Ireland where the framework for specialist training and education for social workers is clearly linked to higher education and the award of academic qualifications at degree and masters level (Northern Ireland Social Care Council/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2006; Galpin, 2009; Walker, 2010; Care Council for Wales, n.d.). Unlike England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland does not have a nationally agreed framework for PQ social work training and education more generally nor child protection social work more specifically. Rather, the Scottish Social Services Council standards and requirements here are cast within a generic development plan for the whole of the social care workforce in Scotland. Developed by the Scottish Social Services Council and the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services in 2008, one of the stated aims of *The Continuous Learning Framework*, was to outline the education and qualifications required of social services staff. However, apart from articulating a common statement of the value base for the social service workforce, it merely refers back to relevant national occupational standards in, for example, social work education (Scottish Executive, 2003) and childhood practice (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007) for specific information regarding qualifications.

Despite the unfavourable reports issued by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in their joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in the Clackmannanshire Council area in February 2008a, the Aberdeen City Council area in November 2008b and the Dundee City Council area in June 2009, and the release of the Brandon Muir Report (Hawthorn and Wilson, 2009), the Scottish Social Services Council has chosen to remain quiet on the issue of specialist training and education despite actively recognising and promoting the need for specialist awards in mental health social work and social work practice learning. Moreover, unlike the regulatory bodies in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the Scottish Social Services Council does not approve provision of specialist post-qualifying programmes in child care and protection.

Context of Educational Provision

On the one hand the lack of a national framework and the silence of the regulator has allowed the development of a range of different training and educational initiatives within Scotland which are being delivered at various levels with a mixed economy of provision. Sector providers, including universities, have been able to develop and deliver courses more or less autonomously without deference to any demands that either the Scottish Government or regulatory bodies may impose. At first sight the advantages for higher education providers appear to be clear cut, given that for some time now they have had to increasingly defer to the demands of the polity, employers and regulators in the development of courses. On the face of it this allows academics some intellectual freedom with regards to the content of courses that permits adherence to the principles underpinning the Bologna Declaration of 1988 which advocates that universities should be independent from such processes and specifically that they should be:

> ... morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power. (Magna Charta, 1988 in Bologna Declaration, 1999 cited in Galpin, 2009, p. 75)

In reality, however, educational provision across the professions is becoming increasingly driven by free market forces that seriously compromise the capacity of universities who have signed up to the Magna Charta to adhere by its principles. Contemporaneously, course development is much more dictated by marketability and profitability. PQ provision within the higher education sector is particularly vulnerable to these influences. In the area of child protection employers are the main purchasers of provision. Increasingly, this means that universities are tailoring their courses to meet the priorities of employers who, as Galpin (2009) highlights, are likely to seek out provision that meets minimum standards at a minimum cost. Of necessity this poses serious challenges to the principles that have traditionally underpinned academic practice in education.

On the other hand the absence of a nationally agreed framework coupled with regulatory silence on this issue has the potential to create a fertile environment from which poor quality provision can flourish. Higher education institutions can be no less culpable than others here, although quality assurance mechanisms operate to monitor teaching standards. The quality of provision offered by various providers is, however, difficult to establish due to a lack of published evaluation. Where it does exist it has been demonstrated to suffer from a lack of methodological robustness (Ogilvie-Whyte, 2006).

Progress at the Qualifying Level: The *Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection*

That said (and setting aside, albeit momentarily, the problem of PQ education and training), following the recommendations of the *Report of the Child Protection Audit and Review*, within Scotland progress has been made to clarify minimum levels of knowledge, skills and understanding required of social work students upon completion of qualifying programmes. In 2006 the Scottish Government published the *Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection* (the KCs) defined as:

> ... learning outcomes and competencies in relation to child care and protection in social work degree programmes ... (Scottish Executive, 2006, p. 1)

The KCs dovetail with the *Framework for Social Work Education* (Scottish Executive, 2003) which underpins the qualifying degree for social work education within Scotland. The *Framework for Social Work Education* sets out the outcomes that students need to achieve to complete their qualifying degree. The document also defines the key sets of knowledge, skills and level of competence that students need to meet to achieve each outcome. The KCs add to these outcomes by requiring students to demonstrate competence in key areas of child protection practice [for a fuller critical discussion of the *Framework for Social Work Education* and the *Key Capabilities in Child Protection* see Mackay and Woodward (2010)].

Currently, educators and employers are working to embed the KCs within Scottish social work degree programmes. It will, therefore, be some time before the impact of

integrating these into social work degree programmes can be assessed in relation to whether or not those exiting qualifying programmes enter the workforce more prepared than their predecessors to work with children, young people and families.

Undoubtedly, the KCs provide a starting point in specifying the minimum standards of professional knowledge, skills and understanding required of qualifying practitioners in this area of work, and within England Lord Laming (2009), although not referring specifically to the KCs, has suggested that a similar approach to the KCs should be integrated into the three-year social work degree. Notably, he has also floated the notion of a specialist degree in children's social work. How this may develop will be interesting given that it implies a return to specialism in the professional education of social workers. The KCs however do not extend to the PQ level. No similar mechanism has been developed for social work practitioners who are already qualified and/or who have missed out on the opportunities for enhancement that the KCs are considered to provide. At the time of writing it is unclear if the Scottish Government has plans for the KCs to dovetail with a future framework at the PQ level. Therefore, whilst the KCs represent some incremental progress there is some way to go before the mechanisms are in place to *fully* meet Recommendation 16 of the *Report of the Child Protection Audit and Review*. Moreover the KCs do not consider the ongoing learning and development needs of the future graduates who will emerge from this new framework.

Responsibility for Post-Qualifying Training and Education

The failure of the KCs to articulate into a similar framework at the PQ level is disappointing. They may very well 'tick the box' in terms of Recommendation 16 insofar as they could be conceived to represent the development of minimum standards of professional knowledge and competence *and* minimum levels of qualification, but they also represent a missed opportunity to have developed a more holistic framework. To our mind, this is extremely problematic. It demonstrates a lack of commitment from both the Scottish Government and the regulator towards the development of child care and protection social work education at the PQ level. However, given that the KCs fit within a competence based model of social work education (as do the Standards in Social Work Education), it is debatable whether or not they would provide a desirable starting point for a serious rethink of the nature of PQ education. Whilst we do not have the scope here to debate the relative merits or demerits of the competence approaches to professional education, we would like to highlight that this approach within social training and education has continuously been criticised for its lack of ability to produce practitioners who have the capacity to work in complex situations. Lymbery (2003), for example, whilst recognising the appeal of the competence model in rendering visible occupational standards, highlights that it has not produced practitioners who are adequately prepared for the tasks associated with complex social work in a milieu of uncertainty and ambiguity. The competence model, he argues, 'oversimplifies the nature of social work' (Lymbery, 2003, p. 105) and focuses upon the mastery of technical skills to the disadvantage of

areas which require critical thinking, reflexivity, creativity, imagination and professional judgement (to name but a few).

Notwithstanding the above; the lack of willingness to ensure the mechanisms are in place for the development of the social work child protection workforce is further reinforced through the location of responsibility for PQ training and education. The onus is firmly placed upon individual practitioners and their employers to identify specific learning needs. The key strategic documents driving workforce development such as the *Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection* (Scottish Executive, 2006), the Scottish Social Services Council *Codes of Practice* (Scottish Social Services Council, 2009), *Continuing Professional Development for the Social Services* (Scottish Social Services Council, 2004), *The Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services* (Scottish Social Services Council/Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, 2008) reinforce this.

This situation is not unique to Scotland. PQ education and training has similarly been located as the responsibility of individuals and employers south of the border. However, recently this has been identified as problematic by the General Social Services Council who have stated that they consider too many employers to have been leaving social workers to manage their PQ training and education by themselves. The recent empirical study by Jack and Donnellan (2010) into the early careers of newly qualified child care social workers emerging from the new qualifying degree programmes, concurrently with the revised PQ education and training framework (General Social Care Council, 2005) in England, reveals this to indeed be the case. In their study they reported that newly qualified workers experienced their employer's approach to their CPD needs as lacking coherence and planning even though they considered the training they had attended as having been of a good standard, helpful and relevant. They also reported that they and their line managers were confused and uncertain about PQ training. Coupled with the kinds of concerns mentioned above, in the ongoing post analysis of the Baby Peter case, the recognition that many newly qualified workers are carrying complex and risky cases which require greater levels of expertise has led the General Social Services Council to also begin to consider ways in which it can make specialist post-qualifying awards in this area of work mandatory (Community Care, 2009; General Social Services Council, 2009).

Development of Post-Qualifying Training and Education

Across the UK the development and delivery of specialist education in child protection work has continued to progress *reactively* in response to these kinds of incidents (Stevenson, 2005), and without a framework that is empirically and conceptually robust. There is, of course, very little in the way of an evidence base to inform the development of training and education in child protection social work at the PQ level. In the first instance, reliable evidence that specialist training and education in child care and protection makes any difference to either practice or client outcomes is thin on the ground, largely because of a lack of robust evaluative data (Ogilvie-Whyte, 2006). Across the UK we have little evidence that PQ education impacts upon service

delivery (Mitchell, 2001; Postle *et al.*, 2002; Brown *et al.*, 2008). Neither do we have any reliable empirical evidence to underpin the basic assumption that specialist training and education in this area has anything better to offer *vis-à-vis* generic training and education. Blom (2004, p. 27), for example, contends that 'clear empirical evidence that generalist practice is better than specialist practice is often lacking'.

Whilst a number of the leading academic providers within Scotland have been quick to respond to an increase in the market demand for PQ courses, a cursory scoping of the evidence base in relation to these issues fast reveals the issues of PQ education in child protection to be under-theorised, under-researched and under-evaluated. Thus it appears that PQ education is being rolled out without reference to an explicit evidence base (Ogilvie-Whyte, 2006) and without pausing to gain conceptual or empirical clarity about what, in fact, specialist education at the post-qualifying level should look like or indeed what it should be aiming to achieve. Moreover, the current evidence base, which at best can be described as limited, is distinctly English in orientation suggesting that Scottish academics have neglected to engage in the development of an evidence base around these issues. Whilst the importance of gaining this knowledge for workforce development has been recognised (Carpenter, 2005; Ogilvie-Whyte, 2006) this neglect of the intellectual basis upon which PQ education is being developed and delivered is troubling indeed. It is all the more troubling given the long history of PQ education in child protection within Scotland.

There are, however, some notable exceptions. For instance, articles by Daniel *et al.*, (1997) and Daniel (2000) respectively consider the development of a module on child development for a PQ child protection course and using Q-sort methodology as an educational and data collection tool to simultaneously stimulate debate and data collection on parenting and decision making in child protection practice. Ogilvie-Whyte (2006) provides a useful review of the evidence base which evaluates the effectiveness of PQ child protection training and education (although it is not specific to the Scottish context *per se*) and Daniel's (2004) research report into the impact of training and education in child protection explores a number of cognate issues. The most recent work of relevance is, however, that by Keys (2009a, 2009b) who reports on the findings of her review of the evidence base relating to the skills needed for child protection teaching and practice. Notwithstanding limited exceptions such as these, the lack of attention given to developing an evidence base suggests a very real dissonance between the professional, political and public discourse which has positioned PQ training and education in child protection as the panacea for improving practice within Scotland and the scholarly activity that is needed to create and maintain the building blocks of effective educational provision that fits the label of 'panacean'. That is not to say that channels of communication do not exist around these issues, however it is our experience that they tend to find their foothold within the oral culture of academics and as such are rooted in the reflective and experiential narratives which belong to educators. Here, we are well aware that a 'collective expertise' exists. However, there is, to our mind, enormous benefits to be gained from an explicit articulation of the existing collective expertise and we are sure that we would not be the only educators within Scotland who would welcome the formal

capturing of this—lest we fall foul of the accusation that we are following the now well documented trend towards anti-intellectualism in social work education (Howe, 1996; Jones, 1996; Kroll, 2004).

So What Underpins Current Provision?

To date, no one has attempted to develop a comprehensive understanding of what the knowledge base for child protection work should look like at the PQ level. Whilst the KCs have arguably attempted to do this at the qualifying level, the evidence base upon which the KCs have been developed lacks transparency. Developed through a process of consultation with key stakeholders, the available publications related to the KCs (Scottish Executive, 2006; Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, 2008) do not render visible how the data collected through this process was used to underpin development. This is despite the latter of these being positioned as describing the development (and embedding) of the KCs. With minimal information available it is therefore difficult to see where the findings of the consultation dovetail with the framework that was produced. Moreover, there is a distinct lack of reference to any underpinning empirical and theoretical work throughout the related documents which obscures the extent to which the KCs have been situated within a relevant research base. The framework itself appears to be substantially grounded in Scottish Government policy documents rather than disciplinary relevant knowledge, thus suggesting a lack of engagement with cognate theory and research. We do, however, state this somewhat tentatively. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the KCs have a robust underpinning, however there is a lack of available information to verify this.

Had the evidence base underpinning the KCs been rendered more visible they could have potentially provided a baseline for the development of a PQ curriculum. As stated previously, the lack of a framework for PQ child protection training and education means that current provision is very much in the hands of educators. Whilst a lack of prescription has its benefits, the downside is that employers and qualified social workers alike are investing a lot of faith (and fiscal resources) in educators developing programmes simply on the strength of their presumed expertise. We would suggest that it is perhaps time that we began to ask questions about this uncritical acceptance of academic expertise [authority] in child protection education within Scotland where there is very little history of rendering visible the content of the PQ courses on offer, their underpinning knowledge base, their modes of design and delivery and the pedagogical frameworks within which they are situated.

We are mindful, however, that we do not appear in this article to be subscribing to an overly empiricist view of evidence or expertise that narrowly associates evidence with formal research and establishes the marker of expertise as being verifiable through the production of the same. Trevillion (2008, p. 448), for instance, reminds us of the possibilities of 'opening up the concept of knowledge to multiple sources of evidence'. Trevillion cites Kearney (2003, p. 6) in raising this, who makes the point that there are other sources of knowledge beyond formal research. These may include knowledge

from frontline practitioners, managers, service users, organisational experience and so on. As we have suggested earlier within this article, it is our experience that forms of knowledge of this ilk do inform the development of PQ child protection programmes. In this article we have referred to this as 'collective expertise'. The language of the evidence base practice movement would call this 'tacit knowledge'.

The key mechanisms through which forms of tacit knowledge or collective expertise are fed into the development of PQ child protection programmes (and other programmes of professional education) are to be found embedded within the prescribed institutional processes for the development of university programmes. There will be variations in the exact procedures used by different universities but generally speaking the development of new academic programmes usually involves extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the formation of some form of working group made up of stakeholder representatives whose function it is to oversee that the developments that take place are robust. Our own mechanisms for the development of our PQ child protection programmes required us to undertake extensive consultation with a range of employers and stakeholding agencies, service user groups, current and previous students, educational specialists (including those with expertise in educational/learning technology and adult/professional pedagogies), other academics (both internal and external to our own university and the disciplines in social work, psychology, sociology, social policy and childhood studies that characterise our teaching team), professional bodies and a range of practitioners in social work, health, law, police and others who are routinely involved in child protection work (reflecting the multi-professional nature of this area of practice). This is by no means an exhaustive list, however it does reflect the scale of the consultation process to some extent. We were also required to conduct extensive evaluation of our current programmes via evaluation research with both previous and current students and the formal capturing of the experiential reflections of teaching staff. In addition to this we had to explore and develop our learning and teaching philosophy and engage in a considerable review of the literature on the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of professional education. A great deal of empirical and theoretical exploration therefore underpins academic programmes which to some extent harvest not only empirical evidence but also forms of collective expertise, tacit and experiential knowledge. All of this influences major decisions around curricula content, modes of delivery, forms of assessment, pedagogic frameworks and so on. Beyond this, academic programmes generally tend to have a steering group of some kind that monitors programmes of study.

Mechanisms such as these open up dialogue on the issues around what PQ child protection training and education should look like—they create knowledge. The challenge is, we would argue, to render this knowledge explicit. In the current context the knowledge created through these processes is rarely published and infrequently shared. It tends therefore to become knowledge which is known only to the organisation in which it was created. We ourselves are as guilty of not disseminating this knowledge as our counterparts in other institutions may be. As we write this, however, it is our intention to begin the process of disseminating the products of our investigations. Here we agree with Dyke *et al.* (2007, cited in Cooner and Hickman, 2008) who

argue that the foundations upon which any design for learning is constructed should be rendered explicit.

Where To Go From Here

It is our view that PQ child protection training and education within Scotland is in need of an urgent but calm analysis. We believe that the time has come for the academic community to become critical. It needs to step up to the mark and practise what it preaches. The academic and policy community continuously speaks to the virtues of evidence based practice (a panacea in itself) as the underpinning framework for frontline practice yet educators appear to consider themselves exempt from such ideals. Given that the case for evidence based education is gaining momentum as professional education is becoming subject to increasing scrutiny (Barr *et al.*, 1999) we would do well to begin to examine if our initiatives are fit for purpose. Currently we are not asking the fundamental questions necessary to develop an educational mandate for PQ child protection training and education, let alone answering them.

As a first step to remedying this we could begin by recognising that our own practice is worthy of reflection and publication as is engagement with the scholarship of our teaching (Webhi, 2009). This should include an examination of what kind of educational processes are most likely to produce the kinds of practitioners that politicians, policy makers and employers repeatedly identify and describe in their public expressions of the desired and ideal practitioner. These expressions are characterised by a language which maps out the characteristics of the 'ideal type' practitioners as 'competent', 'confident', 'autonomous', capable of 'critical and analytical thought', 'reflection' and the ability to synthesise research, theory and practice and in some instances as agents of 'innovation' and 'change'. The workforce strategies we have referred to in this article are peppered with these descriptors. Indeed, these descriptors were recurrently used by the participants who contributed to the consultation process that underpinned the development of our recently introduced postgraduate framework for child protection. As constructs however, they require a great deal of conceptual unpacking. Of course much ink has been spilled over exactly this within the wider literature on social work and professional education. There would be enormous benefits to be gained from a systematic analysis of this literature as well as beginning the venture of developing our own evidence base within Scotland.

The Potential for Evidence Consolidation and Collaboration

Given the lack of a Scottish evidence base to inform the development of PQ child protection training and education we would suggest that the agenda requires urgent focused thought and action at a national level. Recently within Scotland we have seen the development of national initiatives aimed at consolidating and strengthening the research base for child protection and fostering collaboration between researchers and other stakeholders. For instance, the Scottish Child Care and Protection Network was established in 2006 with investment from the Scottish Government and has already

generated a useful audit of child protection relevant research within Scotland (Tarara and Daniel, 2007) as well as brokering collaboration in research. To our knowledge, however, PQ child protection training and education has not [as yet] been established as a strand for either collaboration or research within this. Neither are we aware of any plans within academic, policy and practice networks to establish a similar initiative aimed at the robust development of PQ child protection training and education. Whilst welcoming of initiatives such as these which demonstrate a recognition for the need to improve child protection services through developing and strengthening the evidence base, we are concerned about the ongoing lack of investment in developing PQ child protection training and education—especially because it continues to be considered fundamental to the improvement of practice. However, initiatives such as these provide us with both encouragement and evidence that there is real potential within Scotland for collaborative working on PQ child protection training and education to take place at a national level.

The benefits of collaboration within academic and stakeholding communities have long been recognised (Walsh and Kahn, 2009) in terms of the potential it creates for shared learning and the consolidation and generation of new knowledge. Nevertheless, collaborative working is not without its problems. PQ training and education in child protection has developed within the highly contested and fraught complexities of higher education institutions, employers, professional and regulatory bodies where competing interests, tensions, demands and ideological standpoints have traditionally clashed within British social work education (Cooper and Rixon, 2001). At a UK level these complexions have rendered the development of specialist training and education subject to continuous reconfiguration in attempts to balance out these differences and arrive at a consensus (as yet unresolved) over the form and content of training and education in this area. There are also different ideological views about what training and education in this area should be about, what it should focus on and what level or levels it should be set at. Collaboration on these issues is not an easy route to choose, particularly because educational institutions operate within a competitive marketplace which militates against collaboration.

We are encouraged by the support that the Scottish Government is evidencing in relation to their investment in the Scottish Child Care and Protection Network and most recently the Multi-Agency Resource Service which has been set up to support the work of agencies and professionals. However, if 'people are the key to realising excellent services' (Association of Directors of Social Work/Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 12) then we should not miss the opportunity to simultaneously develop a robust PQ training and education for child protection practitioners. To our minds it is crucial that there is adequate investment in those who are at the frontline of practice and are therefore best placed to improve the lives of children, young people and families.

Conclusion

Within this article we have only begun to touch base on the issues that need to be unpacked within Scotland. We have not, for instance, been able to introduce a debate

on what kind of training and educational processes could produce the kinds of practitioners we desire. Basic conceptual issues, such as the differences between training and education, the now well critiqued competency construct, what the appropriate levels of training and education should be and for whom, and the wider issues connected to pedagogy, have not been interrogated. However, we have reinforced that there is little to show whether current provision in PQ child protection training and education is fit for purpose. It is our contention that the academic community in Scotland needs to attend to the task of developing an evidence base to underpin the development and provision of programmes. We need to begin to assess whether or not our educational initiatives make any difference to practice and service delivery. If they do not, then we need to explore how to remedy this and if they do then we need to share successful practice. There has been little in the way of a national dialogue on these issues with previous initiatives failing to deliver and a lack of commitment on the part of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Social Services Council to the development of a nationally agreed framework for PQ child protection training and education. It is clear, however, that there is the potential within Scotland to begin to generate and/or consolidate evidence and to open up a dialogue on these issues. This could be achieved either by building on existing good practice in, or opening up, new ventures. However, until we do so the particular magic potion that is PQ training and education is currently nothing more than a witches brew; empirically speaking the status it has been granted as a cure-all for raising practice standards is currently nothing more than an untested hypothesis.

Notes

[1] Within Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, child protection is an inter-professional area of practice. However, in this paper we concentrate only on social work training and education within this area of practice.

[2] Each of the four countries within the United Kingdom are individually responsible for the delivery and regulation of social work services and social work education.

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Appendix 2.6 Verification of authorship for paper 2

Confirmation of authorship of journal article (2)

Fit for purpose? Post qualifying social work education in child protection in Scotland: L. Kelly, Jackson, S. International Journal of Social Work Education (forthcoming)

I can confirm that Lynn Kelly was co-author of the above paper. Lynn contributed 50% of the work for this paper

Dr Sharon Jackson

Signed

Date 29.6.2015

Appendix 2.7 Comments from Reviewers for Appendix 5

From: <M.Lefevre@sussex.ac.uk>
To: <l.y.kelly@dundee.ac.uk>
Date: 12/02/2010 17:42
Subject: Social Work Education - Decision on Manuscript ID CSWE-2009-0099

12-Feb-2010

Dear Ms Kelly:

Your manuscript entitled "Fit for purpose? Post qualifying education in child protection in Scotland" which you submitted to Social Work Education, has been reviewed. The assessor comments are included at the bottom of this letter.

The reviews are in general favourable and suggest that, subject to minor revisions, your paper could be suitable for publication. Please consider these suggestions, and I look forward to receiving your revision which we would hope to have within eight weeks. In particular, please do ensure your paper is suitable for an international audience as per the 1st reviewer's comments.

When you revise your manuscript please highlight the changes you make in the manuscript by using the track changes mode in MS Word or by using bold or coloured text.

To submit the revision, log into http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cswe and enter your Author Centre, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision. Please enter your responses to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you made to the original manuscript. Please be as specific as possible in your response to the assessor(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

Because we are trying to facilitate timely publication of manuscripts submitted to Social Work Education, your revised manuscript should be uploaded as soon as possible. If it is not possible for you to submit your revision in a reasonable amount of time, we may have to consider your paper as a new submission.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Social Work Education and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely,
Michelle Lefevre
Editor, Social Work Education
M.Lefevre@sussex.ac.uk

Assessor(s)' Comments to Author:

Assessor: 1
Comments to the Author
I liked this paper. It is well structured and written to a high standard. I would however take issue with some minor points (Is the child protection workforce the same as the social work workforce as the paper implies ? Comments on the key capabilities are uncritical ? Reference to the Stirling University initiative come across as carping (and journalistic in style). Does the evidence not suggest that social work has far greater public, political and media support in Scotland - or at least not the same hostility as in England).

My major concern however is that this paper is being presented to an an international audience and there is a danger that if presented in its current form it will come across as parochial and a significant opportunity will have been lost. The paper would be enriched by :

- Looking in greater depth and more critically at the relationship between higher education and state sponsored social work.
- This could be done by locating the paper in a wider international and European context (see Walter Lorenz's work describing social work in the UK as being uniquely positioned between the public and private spheres).
- Additionally you could explore in greater depth the emerging policy divergence within the UK in relation to PQ and Child Protection more generally.

Assessor: 2
Comments to the Author
This article addresses an important issues for child protection workers, managers and educators in Scotland, and has some wider implications fo the rest of the UK. Although it is Scottish focussed, comparisons are drawn with the other countries of the UK, and , on the whole the Scottish context is clearly explained.

The article is well written although at times the language is more literary and at others a journalistic approach is taken. This is clearly a stylistic issue but the authors may wish to consider this. The other stylistic issue is that of the use of very long sentences, with little punctuation, which means that the meaning isn't always clear on first reading- see for example page 4 para 3 lines 1-6, page 12 para 3 lines 1-5.

Content page 8 Key Capabilities- more information is required to indicate of what these consist, perhaps as a footnote

Appendix 2.8 Feedback from internal assessor on RPL Claim

School of Education, Social Work and Community Education

Professional Doctorate Programme

Assessment of Claim for Recognition of Prior Learning

DEd

Student Name		Lynn Kelly
Amount of Claim (as % of programme)		20% (1 module)
	Comments	
Knowledge and Understanding (KU)	Clearly demonstrated in the two papers. Both showed strong evidence of rigorous, critical thinking and significance for the field.	
Practice: Applied Knowledge and Understanding (P)	Although discursive and theoretical in nature, the two papers were very robust in their approach and argumentation.	
Generic Cognitive Skills (G)	Good. Well evidenced.	
Communication, ICT and Numeracy Skills (C)	Although, by nature, not addressing nearly all aspects of this part of the SCQF, the work was very appropriate to the audience.	
Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others (A)	I thought more could have been made of this. There are two good examples of outputs from joint working. What wasn't made all that clear in the actual claim was how you worked with the two other authors. The evidence of both autonomy, in working on your specific contributions, and working with others was left implicit, rather than made clear.	
Original Contribution to Knowledge	I'm confident that both papers represent work of significance in Scotland and beyond.	
General Comments		
I was slightly confused about the presentation of some of the work. For instance, for 3.1, although based on a jointly authored paper you talk about 'my critique of the literature'. That may be because that was part of your specific contribution, which is fine, but it would have helped for this to be made clear. Overall, I don't think there's any real question about this submission and whether it meets the requirements. The only thing missing is some detail about how the relative contributions of the authors actually broke down in practice, i.e. beyond just the relative proprotional contributions. A paragraph for each paper that just dealt with that should easily suffice.		
Marker Murray Simpson		**Date** 23 March 2012
Recommendation		**return for amendment**
External Examiner comments		

Appendix 2.9 RPL recognition for MSc Applied Professional Studies

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From: Elizabeth Hannah (Staff)
Sent: 02/07/2015 12:28
To: Lynn Kelly (Staff)
Cc: Eilidh Reilly (Staff)
Subject: RE: APEL claim

Hi Lynn

Thanks for sending me a scanned copy of your Masters certificate.

Students entering the programme with a relevant full Masters degree containing an assessed research methods unit can seek advanced entry directly into Module 2. On that basis I am happy to retrospectively grant you RPL for Module 1 of the DEd.

Best wishes
Beth

Dr Elizabeth F. S. Hannah
Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology
Programme Director, Professional Doctorate (DEdPsy, DEd, DSW, DCLD)
Programme Director, MSc Educational Psychology
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